INCUBATING EQUITY:
THE DRIVERS AND SUPPORTS THAT PROMOTE EQUITY-MINDED ASSESSMENT
PRAXIS AT TWO HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTIONS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

In 2017, the field of assessment developed an equity consciousness. While equitable assessment practices were already happening in pockets of higher education before then, the field began to expand these conversations more widely. Since then, assessment practitioners have been more actively discussing equitable assessment practices and using assessment data to explore and address inequities. However, the field still lacks important understanding about the contexts within which equity-minded assessment thrives. What motivates this approach to assessment? What supports equity-minded assessment so that it can become sustainable and grow? What role should diverse learners have in equity-minded assessment? Using Montenegro and Jankowski's (2020) equity-minded assessment model as a conceptual framework, this study uses a critical multiple case study research design to explore these questions. Interviews were conducted with 37 participants actively engaged in equity-minded assessment across two Hispanic-Serving Institutions. Findings are presented first within each case by providing an overview of the larger institutional context, and then offering the focused case context within which equity-minded assessment occurs. Two themes which are distinctive to each case are discussed. Finally, four themes across both cases—Grassroots Assessment, Intentional Assessment, Mission Empowered Assessment, and Student-Focused Assessment—help understand what type of motivators drive equity-minded assessment to take place in the first place, what types of supports help equity-minded assessment grow, and the role of students in the assessment process.

Para mi mamá, Eva.
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Chapter I:

Introduction

Over the last four decades, higher education stakeholders have become increasingly curious about the impact that colleges and universities have on the lives of students and communities (Ewell, 1987, 1991; U.S. Department of Education, 2006; Jankowski et al., 2018). As a result, assessment of student learning has grown from being a testing-focused process towards a core element of how higher education institutions can gather and use broader data on student learning to remain accountable to external stakeholders and use those data to improve internally (Brink, 2011). However, a significant part of the conversation that has been missing—until fairly recently—has been how assessment can also be used to explore and remedy inequities impacting different student populations within colleges and universities (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017). While more and more institutions, higher education organizations, and academic journals are promoting assessment practices that are mindful of equity issues (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020), there is very little understanding regarding how these equity-minded assessment practices come to be in the first place at the few institutions where equity-minded assessment is happening. What motivates the use of equity-minded assessment? What supports equity-minded assessment?

If equity-minded assessment praxis is to be more widely used as a means to create a paradigm shift towards how the field of assessment approaches its work, there must also be an understanding of the motivators that help equity-minded assessment happen in the first place. There needs to be an understanding of the supports that keep equity-minded assessment going once it does occur. To build this understanding, the study asks three questions: (1) why do faculty, administrators, and staff involved in equity-minded assessment at Hispanic-Serving

Institutions conduct assessment work from an equitable perspective?; (2) How could equity become central to the assessment of student learning in support of the success of students of color and those from marginalized backgrounds?; and (3) What role should undergraduate students—specifically students of color and those from populations outside of the campus majority—have in assessment? The first two questions get to the motivators and the supports, respectively, behind equity-minded assessment. The third question asks about a central piece of equity-minded assessment that has proven to be controversial (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020) to see how deep-rooted the commitment to equity-minded assessment is in light of the motivators and supports. Together, these research questions help fill an important gap in the literature and provide insights that can help the field of assessment more widely adapt equity-minded practices.

The main purpose of the study is to develop a deeper understanding of the motivators and supports of equity-minded assessment in higher education. To appropriately fulfill this purpose, the study utilizes a critical multiple case study design. There are two cases comprising the study—West Coast University and Midwest University—both of which are Hispanic Serving Institutions. Since the study deals with equity, it was important to analyze how equity-minded assessment occurs in highly diverse institutions; and Hispanic-Serving Institutions are amongst the most diverse colleges and universities in the country (Excelencia in Education, 2016b). The responses from the two cases are used to develop themes that inform the types of environments that help equity-minded assessment take hold and thrive.

This chapter provides an overview of the study, beginning with a brief background on the topic. Then, the problem statement and rationale for why the study is needed are introduced, followed by a deeper explanation of the study's purpose. Next, the study's significance and potential implications for future research are explained. The chapter concludes by defining

common terms used throughout the study, introducing the study's limitations, stating the assumptions guiding the study, and providing an overview of the remaining chapters.

Background

Given the various campaigns to increase the number of Americans with a college degree or credential (Obama, 2011; Lumina Foundation, 2017, 2019, 2020), colleges and universities are under pressure to provide outcomes information and prove their 'value-added.' Conflating these external calls for accountability is the fact that the demographics of the country are radically shifting towards a minority-majority population; while college access and graduation rates are still disproportionately low for students of color (Del Rios & Leegwater, 2008; Li & Carroll, 2007; Musu-Gillette et al., 2016).

Student learning outcomes assessment (henceforth referred to as 'assessment') provides authentic information on what course, programmatic, and/or institutional learning goals students have reached (Schuh, 2009). Assessment plays a key role in demonstrating what students know and can do as a result of completing a course and/or program, attaining a credential, or attending a co-curricular activity. Kuh and colleagues (2015a) define assessment as the systematic "gathering and use of evidence of student learning in decision making and in strengthening institutional performance and public accountability" (p. 2). That is to say, assessment takes stock of what students know and can do as a result of attending higher education, and that information is then used for institutional/ programmatic improvement and to meet external accountability requirements.

It is the 'use' portion of assessment—using it to make evidence-based changes—which makes assessment consequential for improvement of teaching and learning. The real value of assessment lies within its consequence. As pragmatist thought would say: the true value in

efforts such as assessment lies in how it is used and in the results of its use, and not in the

process itself (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). But, as Montenegro and Jankowski (2017) ask, how

consequential can assessment truly be if it is only appropriate for some students while possibly

perpetuating inequities for others? How useful is assessment if it is not also used to close equity

gaps that plague institutions and negative affect how some student populations succeed—or do

not—in college?

While many aspects of higher education have acknowledged the need to better support

students from diverse backgrounds, assessment has largely remained unchanged (Montenegro &

Jankowski, 2017). Instead, the field has approached assessment by treating all students as being

one in the same even as related fields such as evaluation have long championed the need for

cultural responsiveness and equitable approaches (Hood & Hopson, 2008; Stake, 1975). While

assessment of student learning has become a familiar requirement in higher education, it was not

until fairly recently that assessment began to sporadically use an equity mindset; let alone used

data to purposefully explore and help address inequities affecting diverse student populations

(Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

The good news is that the field of assessment has begun to take issues of equity more

seriously, and there are more examples now of how an equity perspective can be applied to

assessment to make it more equity-minded compared to five years ago (Montenegro &

Jankowski, 2020). This includes approaching assessment from a culturally responsive paradigm

Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017; Kulp, Lockley, & Grandstaff, 2020), an assessment for social

justice approach (Dorimé-Williams, 2018), or using a critical perspective to interrogate ongoing

assessment processes (Heiser, Prince, & Levy, 2017). Assessment practitioners are now

becoming more aware of how assessment can either help fix or help worsen inequities depending on how it is conducted and how assessment data are used to create change.

The problem is that the field of assessment still needs more examples of how equity-minded assessment can be enacted and supported in order to turn that awareness into sustainable action. Until now, those examples have been primarily focused on making specific tools and processes more equity-minded. Very little research builds understanding of how institutions, programs, and individuals can be motivated and supported to make equity-minded assessment the norm and not the exception. The field of assessment does not have clear examples of how the institution and/or department norms, policies, and culture helps or hinders assessment that is equity-minded. Much has been written, however, about how the institution/department culture dictates how impactful assessment can be towards improving student learning (Stanny, 2018). The field of assessment needs to also understand how leadership affects practitioners' willingness to embed an equity perspective within assessment. What institutional/departmental cultures help support equity-minded assessment? Developing this understanding can help make equity-minded assessment more impactful.

In a practical field like assessment, people are always seeking examples they can learn from, adapt to fit their needs, and implement for their own practice. However, equity work is very contextualized. Not every institution will have the same inequities, and inequities which are generalizable across higher education—such as graduation rates for Latinx, Black, and Native American students—can manifest differently for different populations across programs. Engaging in equity-minded assessment may not be as easy as adapting someone else's equity-minded practice into another context.

To make equity-minded assessment be as meaningful as it can be, there may need to be deeper changes to the overall culture and embedded support systems where equity-minded assessment is taking place. Having this understanding can help make equity-minded assessment more meaningful, more impactful, and help it become the norm instead of the exception across higher education. Currently, there is no research that offers this guidance. Given the changing enrollments across the country and the permanence of inequities across communities of color and other diverse learner populations (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016), it is imperative that institutions have as much understanding as possible about practices that can help remedy these inequities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to use a critical multiple case study research design to understand why faculty, staff, and administrators at two Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the U.S. have approached assessment from an equity-minded perspective, and how these practices are being supported in order meaningfully address inequities affecting diverse learners. To meet this purpose, the study involves a mix of one-on-one, group, and focus group interviews with 37 participants across both cases—20 participants from Midwest University and 17 from West Coast University. Participant roles fell into four main categories: faculty, staff, administrators, or students. Interviews were guided by the study's three main research questions:

1. Why do faculty, administrators, and staff involved in equity-minded assessment at Hispanic-Serving Institutions conduct assessment work from an equity perspective?

2. How could equity become central to the assessment of student learning in support of the success of students of color and those from marginalized backgrounds?

3. What role should undergraduate students—specifically students of color and those from populations outside of the campus majority—have in assessment?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because inequities in opportunity and educational quality not only continue to persist among different student populations, but they may actually be widening due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Lumina Foundation, 2020). Intentional efforts are needed to use holistic, equity-minded learning and teaching approaches—of which assessment is an important piece—to improve the fairness and impacts of higher education for all students; not just those in majority populations. Assessment, in particular, is in a prime position to help ensure more equitable learning outcomes because it permeates pedagogy, coursework, curriculum design, and policy. Assessment data are gathered from and used to inform and improve these elements.

If institutions are not in positions to welcome, motivate, and support equity-minded assessment approaches, then higher education is limiting itself. As Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) mention, if assessment is not done from an equity-minded perspective, then colleges and universities run the risk of privileging specific types of learning over others and contributing to inequities. Further, by missing the opportunity to use assessment data to find and address inequities before they become harmful to students causes institutions to play catch-up instead of being proactive. This will become increasingly important as higher education continues to diversify since persistent inequities can turn higher education into an unfair chasm for millions of students. Education is heralded as the great equalizer, but research shows this is disproportionately true amongst different student populations (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). This study can help colleges and universities identify ways to implement, drive, and support assessment practices that make education more equitable for students of color and other diverse learners.

By focusing on Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), this study has the potential to improve the educational experiences and outcomes for students of color and other diverse learners. HSIs enroll a significant proportion of Latinx students—a population experiencing inequitable outcomes in higher education (Musu-Gillette, 2016)—but are amongst the most diverse institutions in higher education across racial/ethnic enrollment (Excelencia in Education, 2016b). While this study can help inform how equity-minded assessment can be applied to institutions enrolling Latinx students, this study does not solely focus on Latinx students. Rather, findings of this study more closely apply to commuter students —students who live off-campus often at home with their families and commute to campus for class—which is a non-homogeneous population that experience gaps of their own across higher education (Harper, Smith, & Davis, 2018; Garland, 2015; Kodama, 2015; Wicker, 2004). Focusing on a population that encompasses a 'diverse' set of learners instead of just on one specific race/ethnicity can hopefully serve to broaden understanding of how equity-minded assessment can be expanded. This lens can help widen the net for how institutions can use the findings of this study to drive and support assessment practices that are mindful of equity issues affecting their specific campuses. This can help move the conversation beyond seeking hyper-specific examples—those that can help close a specific outcome for a specific population that is of interest to a specific institution/program—and instead focus on larger processes, supports, and environments that can create the foundation for equity-minded initiatives to thrive. With that said, the importance of centering race/ethnicity when speaking about inequities cannot be understated.

This study develops an understanding of the culture in which equity-minded assessment takes place and thrives; where those that do equity-minded assessment get their motivation, and how different stakeholders, the culture itself, and policies help support equity-minded

assessment. Understanding these elements is an essential aspect of being able to meaningfully implement impactful equity-minded practices that can be sustained. Prior to this study, such an understanding was absent from the literature. This study can help develop a roadmap for institutions and/or programs seeking to create the necessary cultural and policy changes to make equity-minded assessment possible and widespread in order to help close equity gaps affecting their students.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a bright spotlight on the various inequities that students of color, students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, and other diverse learners are experiencing in college (Lumina Foundation, 2020; Aucejo et al., 2020; Wilson, 2020). While this study was conducted before the pandemic, the study's significance has only been heightened due to the repercussions of COVID-19. If the projected diversifying college enrollments were not important drivers for increasing equity-minded practices across higher education, then the COVID-19 pandemic certainly has served to put equity at the forefront of higher education's obligations. This study has the potential to help colleges and universities understand what a shift towards equity-mindedness in assessment requires so they can be more proactive in addressing inequities.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout the study. The definitions offer a better understanding of how readers should conceptualize each term within the study's context.

Assessment. When the study speaks about 'assessment' it is specifically referencing student learning outcomes assessment. Assessment is a process aimed at understanding what students know and can do as a result of either a specific learning experience or as a result of a culmination of learning experiences. Kuh and colleagues define assessment as

the systematic "gathering and use of evidence of student learning in decision making and in strengthening institutional performance and public accountability" (2015a, p.2). An important distinction in this definition is that assessment data are also used to make evidence-based decisions. Thus, simply gathering student learning data is not in itself meeting the full definition of assessment.

Assessment for Accountability. This approach to assessment is primarily driven by the need to fulfill external stakeholder demands for data that show the value of an entire institution's or a specific program's educational experiences. As Russell and Markle (2017) explain, assessment for accountability is primarily focused on providing external comparisons of educational value, and often leads to disengaged assessment activities since assessment tends to be episodic; only conducted as compliance needs arise. In assessment for accountability, assessment data are rarely shared across the institution and the focus of conversations tend to be on sample sizes, psychometrics, or implementation fidelity of assessment tools (Russell & Markle, 2017). (A variation of this term also used in the study is 'assessment culture for accountability'.)

Assessment for Improvement. This assessment approach aligns directly to the Kuh and colleagues (2015a) definition of assessment, with an explicit focus on using assessment data to have internal conversations about pedagogy, the curriculum, policy, and so on to inform the betterment of learning. In assessment for improvement, the assessment process is ongoing and integrated into other institutional processes to drive evidence-based action (Russell & Markle, 2017). It is an intentional process that often requires a cultural shift within institutions and departments to instill a commitment to being evidence-based and genuine interest in

uncovering ways to improve students' learning outcomes (Fulcher et al., 2014). (A variation of this term also used in the study is 'assessment culture for improvement'.)

      Commuter. This term refers to college students who do not live on-campus in housing that is owned or approved by the institution—specifically residence halls, fraternity/sorority houses, or special living communities for specific populations such as students with disabilities or students who are veterans (Jacoby, 1989).

      Culturally Responsive. Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) say that it would be "deleterious for students to have their cultural identities rejected in school and unacknowledged as integral to student learning" (p. 1285) especially as college classrooms continue to diversify. In line with this sentiment, cultural responsiveness deals with making sure that practices are not only appropriate for the majority of students who are being served, but are also mindful of how those in minority populations. It involves continuously altering practices as student populations change, and ensuring that student differences are leveraged as a source of strength to the learning process as opposed to a detriment (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). Culturally responsive practices use aspects of students' cultural identities to make lessons, materials, and experiences more relevant to them for the purpose of increasing student engagement (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Instilling a culturally responsive approach to assessment is part of equity-minded assessment, and can lead to better outcomes for diverse learners (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017, 2020).

      Equity. In its most fundamental level, equity means fairness. However, as Jordan (2010) explains it, equity is complex to define when it is situated within social or educational phenomena. "What is equitable and fair can be better understood in relationship to other things and from within a given context. In other words, perspectives of equity may vary among diverse

groups" (Jordan, 2010, p. 147). As such, it is difficult to objectively describe what is equitable, and much of equity considerations depend on context. This study uses this understanding of equity to view it as a contextual and continuous strive for what is fair in search for equality in outcomes across student populations. Also following Jordan's (2010) logic that "it is difficult, if at all possible, to measure learning using a common yardstick in a diverse environment, it is similarly problematical to define equity using a unitary metric" (p. 147), this study approaches equity in relation to assessment as a concept that needs to be redefined and re-explored continuously since what is fair or needed by students to properly assess and improve their learning changes with enrollments.

Equity-Minded. This is a concept that was brought to prominence largely by the work of Dr. Estela Bensimon and the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California. Equity-mindedness is in itself a framework that helps understand the causes of and solutions for equity gaps in learning outcomes (Malcom-Piquex & Bensimon, 2017). When one is equity-minded, they are intentionally being race conscious in their exploration of equity gaps; they maintain a focus on the institution as the unit of analysis so that exploration of equity gaps and solutions to resolve them are parts of larger conversations across institutional departments; and they are evidence-based and use both qualitative and quantitative data to holistically understand the causes and possible solutions for inequities (Bensimon & Malcolm, 2012; Malcom- Piquex & Bensimon, 2017; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Center for Urban Education, n.d.). Equity-mindedness is more than being aware or being mindful about inequities. It involves actively working to find, understand, and resolve inequities.

Equity-Minded Assessment. Equity-minded assessment takes the equity-minded framework set forth by Bensimon and colleagues and intentionally applies it within every step in

the assessment process (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020). Simply being equity-minded in one part of the assessment process does not yield equity-minded assessment (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020). As Dr. Tia B. McNair (2019) explains: meaningful equity work is not something one can engage in only when it is convenient. Equity-minded assessment is an intentional and involved approach to assessment that is embedded within already existing assessment practices focused on improvement. Equity-minded assessment also involves being culturally responsive in the types of assessment approaches utilized, purposefully utilizing data to continuously seek out inequities, using varied sources of evidence to develop a holistic understanding of the causes of inequities, and using assessment data to close equity gaps (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020).

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). According to the Higher Education Act (1965), HSIs are colleges and universities where at least 25% of their full-time equivalent undergraduate enrollment is Latinx. HSIs must also enroll a significant portion of their undergraduate students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds since at least 50% of HSI students must be Pell Eligible or qualify for federal financial aid programs like work study, the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG) (Higher Education Act, 1965).

Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). 'MSI' is a special designation for higher education institutions which enroll a significant proportion of students of color (or minority students) as part of their overall college enrollment. MSIs were created under section F of the Higher Education Act (1965) to recognize and make additional funding available to institutions serving minority populations. There are currently seven types of MSIs: Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Asian American and Native

American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), Alaskan Native or Native Hawaiian (ANNH) serving-institutions, Native American-Serving Nontribal Institutions (NASNTIs).

Limitations

There are various limitations associated with the study. For one, this is a qualitative study utilizing a multiple case study approach. Inherent to case studies, the generalizability of the study is limited. The study is also difficult to replicate in order to verify findings. The study can also be impacted and guided by the researcher's subjectivity and experience in conducting case study research. Relatedly, the main data collection method were semi-structured interviews which makes the quality of data attained reliant on interview design and the researcher's ability to follow-up, maintain focus, dig deeper, and really get the necessary data from participants. Resource constraints also could have impacted the study. Since the researcher had to travel to the case locations, limited resources—primarily time and financial—could have impacted the depth of information and breadth of observations gathered as part of the study. Finally, within case participants are self-selecting given that each case is a bounded system. While this sampling process is not a limitation, the perspective/disposition of participants can be since they may be more likely to have a positive disposition towards the phenomenon at hand.

Assumptions

The study is also governed by various assumptions. Primarily, the study assumes that all participants were honest and candid about their experiences, and did not have ulterior motives for participating. The study assumes that the methods are appropriate for developing an understanding of equity-minded assessment drivers and supports. The study also assumes that the findings are an accurate representation of the equity-minded assessment motivators, supports,

and approaches at Midwest University and West Coast University at the time the study was conducted. Finally, the study assumes that equity-minded assessment is an important means for higher education to appropriately support diverse learners and, therefore, should be of interest to the wider higher education community.

Summary

The field of assessment has begun to open the door for equity-mindedness to take hold. More and more assessment practitioners are interrogating their assessment practice and asking how they can instill more equitable approaches. Policy makers and accreditors are encouraging institutions to use assessment to explore inequities (Arnold et al., 2019; WSCUC, 2020; NWCCU, 2019; Humphreys & Gaston, 2019). The field is now ready to move to the next step and begin to interrogate how the larger institutional culture, how policies, and other campus supports work to either hinder or drive equity-minded assessment forward. This study seeks to fill this need by allowing institutions to understand the types of commitment it takes for equity-minded assessment to be done meaningfully. How individuals can be motivated to engage in the work. How the work and those conducting it can be best supported by leadership. How the culture and environment where equity-minded assessment happens feed into the work as much as the equitable approaches themselves.

The next chapters will provide a detailed overview of how the study meets its purpose. Chapter 2 presents a review of current and relevant literature central to the discussion of equity-minded assessment in higher education, including a discussion of the guiding conceptual framework. Chapter 3 describes the research methods, including the study design, procedures for sampling, data collection, and analysis, role of the researcher, and how the study protects participants' rights. Chapter 4 begins reporting the findings and associated discussion by offering

an overview of each case context and discussing two findings/themes that are distinctive to each

case. Chapter 5 continues the findings and discussion by offering four concluding tenets that

were observed across both cases. These four tenets can be thought of as the overarching

takeaways from the study that speak to the different motivators and supports that equity-minded

assessment requires: ultimately a holistic approach to assessment. Chapter 5 also sets forth the

study's implications for research and practice, and next steps for this research.

Chapter II:

Review of Literature

This chapter explores the relevant literature on topics that are of importance to the study. The chapter begins with an exploration into equity-mindedness as a concept apart from assessment. The study uses Montenegro and Jankowski's (2020) model for equity-minded assessment as the conceptual framework. The study also embeds this equity-minded perspective within the review of literature itself by conducting a critical literature review using Critical Race Theory as a lens through which to interpret and make sense of the literature. The chapter includes a brief history of assessment to explore how it has evolved over the years, its relationship with concepts such as testing and evaluation, and ultimately leading to the role of equity in assessment. The review of literature concludes with exploring research on Hispanic-Serving Institutions and Latinx students.

Equity-Mindedness

The study talks about a very specific form of assessment: equity-minded assessment. Before exploring what equity-minded assessment is and how the study uses it as a conceptual framework to guide and interpret the findings, there needs to be a common understanding regarding what 'equity-mindedness' is in the first place. At the surface, equity-mindedness can seem to simply be a conscious awareness towards equity; being attentive to the fact that inequities exist. However, Dr. Estela Bensimon and her Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California have developed a richer definition for how this lens should be approached. Equity-mindedness is comprised of five principles (Malcolm-Piquex & Bensimon, 2017; Center for Urban Education, n.d.):

1. **Evidence based:** Equity-minded practitioners use data to uncover, better understand inequities, and explore how institutional factors contribute to it. Evidence is gathered by using multiple sources of data, especially disaggregated qualitative and quantitative data, and this evidence is used to formulate institution-specific solutions. "Campuses who concentrate on identifying 'off the shelf solutions' for inequitable outcomes face challenges in closing equity gaps" (Malcolm-Piquex & Bensimon, 2017, p. 7). Evidence should be used to identify areas of improvement, and changes made must be appropriate for the institution, department, and, most importantly, students.

2. **Race conscious:** Equity-mindedness requires talking about race in direct, open, and honest ways; especially regarding the role that racism and systemic oppression has in perpetuating inequities. This involves actively exploring inequities in outcomes by different student demographics. Being race conscious also requires avoiding the use of euphemisms—i.e. 'diversity'—when specifically meaning students who are Latinx, Black, Native American, low-socioeconomic, adult, commuter, etc. Using terms like diversity when there is a specific population experiencing inequities can serve to ignore the problem and implementing practices that do not directly address the issues.

3. **Institutionally Focused:** Equity-minded faculty, staff, and administrators not only recognize that institutional policy and norms can contribute and/or create inequities, but also actively work towards eliminating barriers and challenges that disproportionately hinder students of color. This involves being asset-based and having a growth mindset towards students. Instead of ascribing equity gaps or outcomes deficits to student characteristics—e.g. disengagement, lack of preparation, intelligence—equity-mindedness calls for interrogating the institution's culture, practices, and policies to

eliminate or improve aspects that may be contributing to inequities. In equity-minded institutions, practitioners believe that it is part of their responsibility to actively work towards closing equity gaps.

4. **Systemically Aware:** "To possess systemic awareness is to understand the ways in which current inequities are related to structural inequalities and the historic and ongoing denial of educational and economic opportunity experienced by African Americans, Latinas/os, Native Americans, and other racially minoritized populations" (Malcolm-Piquex & Bensimon, 2017, p. 7). Simply stated, the academy cannot be separated from social issues affecting students of color and other diverse learners. To be equity-minded, one needs to also be aware of how racial/ethnic inequities in society permeate college classrooms and environments, and how these systemic inequities affect students' preparation and opportunities.

5. **Equity Advancing:** Equity-mindedness requires action. Equity-minded practitioners continuously work to advance equity through their daily interactions and responsibilities, and also by empowering others to be equity-minded, as well. For example, those who supervise teams, are department heads, or serve in an administrative capacity can use their positions to build a culture where equity-mindedness is the norm; where people are empowered to engage with issues of equity and actively work to fix them.

Together, these five principles create a model for equity-minded practice in higher education; a model that Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) have adapted and embedded within an equity-minded framework for assessment.

Conceptual Framework

Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) coupled the equity-mindedness model with assessment research, discourse, and examples of equitable assessment practice taking place between 2017 and 2019 to create a framework for equity-minded assessment. They developed four main principles. First, *equity-minded assessment begins with meaningful student involvement* in assessment. Too often students are an afterthought in the assessment process even though their learning is the object of assessment and ultimately they have the most to gain or lose from how assessment data are used to make changes (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017). From an equity-minded approach, students are at the center of the assessment effort. Not only are assessment tools, methods, and decisions altered to be equity-minded and in tune with students' needs, but the student voice also has a set place at every step of the assessment process (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020). Learning outcomes statements are interpreted by or co-created with students to ensure they are written in student-friendly language and include goals that are important for students but may not be reflected in the syllabus (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020). Student interviews or focus groups are periodically conducted to understand outcome inequities, to interpret or contextualize data, and offer feedback on intended and subsequently implemented changes. The ways students are involved will depend on the outcome being assessed, the institution/program context, and the students themselves. Regardless, students should have an active role if assessment is to be equity-minded.

Second, *assessment data should be meaningfully disaggregated, intentionally explored for inequities, and used for improvement.* As Montenegro & Jankowski (2020) state, "Meaningful disaggregation involves deeper analyses by specific student characteristics, alongside the intersection between and among them" (p. 11). This means that in order for

disaggregation of data to be meaningful, the analyses must go beyond just looking at data by male/female or by race/ethnicity. Instead, other characteristics should be included to allow in-depth exploration of possible inequities between the different elements of students' identities. For example, this helps to explore how male, Latinx, veteran, full-time freshman students are doing on critical thinking compared to their female peers with all other variables held constant. This deeper analysis, while facilitated by rich data, is ultimately driven by practitioner's sense of inquiry and commitment to exploring inequities through data. "An important aspect of meaningful disaggregation is thus knowing which questions to ask and what to do with the different findings" (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020, p. 12). Data must be used to improve and to close equity gaps; a clear alignment with Malcolm-Piquex and Bensimon's (2017) equity-minded assessment model.

The third principle of equity-minded assessment is the use of *context-specific approaches and responses* (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020). Similar to how Malcolm-Piquex and Bensimon (2017) warn against using 'off the shelf' solutions (p. 7), Montenegro & Jankowski (2020) urge those conducting equity-minded assessment to devote ample time to (1) interrogate their own assessment practices, policies, tools, and norms; (2) to understand their institution and/or program context; and (3) take stock of the students who are experiencing inequities. The purpose is that by being aware of these contexts, the assessment process can be more meaningful, applicable, and appropriate for finding and working to close equity gaps. Interrogating current assessment approaches helps uncover possible biases, areas where deficit-based assumptions are guiding the work, and how systems of power/oppression/racism are influencing the assessment process. Understanding the context where equity-minded assessment is taking place can also

help to identify collaboration, ways to tie the assessment effort to larger equity goals for the institution, and garner support (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020).

Finally, *equity-minded assessment must be embedded in an assessment process for improvement* (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020). Instead of being an entirely new way of doing assessment, an equity-minded approach simply requires embedding equity-mindedness into current assessment praxis. This is where interrogating current assessment approaches is important to understand how current assessment practice can be improved and made more equitable. But in order to effectively embed equity-mindedness into assessment, those who are involved with assessment must be devoted to doing equity work (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020). The rationale for this being that an equity mindset is not something that can be applied only when it is convenient, and ignored when it becomes too time-consuming (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020; McNair, 2019). The risks of not being fully-devoted to equity work *while doing* equity-work are simply too significant; especially when considering that a misstep could serve to perpetuate or widen inequities that further set students of color and other marginalized populations further behind. Montenegro & Jankowski (2020) offer six guidelines for embedding equity-mindedness within ongoing assessment for improvement processes:

1. check biases and ask reflective questions throughout the assessment process to address assumptions and positions of privilege;

2. use multiple sources of evidence appropriate for the students being assessed and assessment effort;

3. include student perspectives and take action based on perspectives;

4. increase transparency in assessment results and actions;

5. ensure collected data can be meaningfully disaggregated and interrogated; and

6. make evidence-based changes that address issues of equity that are context-specific (p. 13).

Montenegro and Jankowski's (2020) framework for equity-minded assessment will serve as a lens through which to interpret, explore, and understand the equitable assessment practices of the cases in the study. The foundational understanding of equity-minded assessment set forth by Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) provide guidance to not only understand the practice, but make connections to how motivators and supports identified by study participants relate to equity-minded assessment. Finally, this conceptual framework also helped shape the study design and findings. For example, since Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) begin their explanation of equity-minded assessment by unequivocally stating that students must be a focal point in assessment, the study includes four students in the sample, a specific research question deals with involving students in assessment, and student-centeredness was a finding. This conceptual framework has helped to organize the research data into themes appropriate to advance the understanding of the motivators and supports for equity-minded assessment at two Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

Critical Review of Literature

Before diving into the literature review, it is important to understand the perspective from which this literature review was approached. This study utilizes a critical review of literature. This means that issues surrounding race and social justice will permeate the review of literature. In order to do this, critical race theory will be brought as a guiding lens through which to interpret what has been said in the literature and give thought to what is missing and/or how it relates to equity-mindedness in assessment. For example, in offering a brief history of the evolution of the field of assessment, the purpose is to provide an understanding of how the field

arrived to a place where equity can be embedded. A critical lens allows the researcher interrogate the literature from a perspective that may not be typically brought to conversations of assessment. It allows the study to combine discussion of cultural relevance, civil rights, social justice, racism, and so on within a literature base that tends to view assessment as objective and free from these issues. A critical perspective allows exploration of Hispanic-Serving Institutions and all the benefits they bring to Latinx learners, while also questioning their persistent challenges and how these may feed inequities affecting Latinx learners. Overall, select tenets of Critical Race Theory helped provide the critical perspective for the review of literature.

Critical Race Theory

When analyzing issues that impact students of color, lenses such as Critical Race Theory (CRT) can serve as a guiding lens through which to interpret, discuss, and question issues of higher education. In this instance, CRT serves as a way through which to view and interpret assessment, HSI, and Latinx literature. For example, a CRT lens can serve as a lens through which to interrogate assessment praxis so that it becomes more equity-minded. CRT can help question or interpret the literature with an intentional focus on equity, race, power, oppression, and so on. CRT allows the study to acknowledge the good that HSIs do for Latinx students while also being critical about why HSIs are not graduating Latinx students at higher rates. What is missing from the assessment conversation? Or rather, *who* is missing from such conversations? The background of CRT is interdisciplinary, adapting scholarly perspectives from law, women's studies, ethnic studies, and sociology (Bell, 1987; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001) to challenge "racism as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25). CRT has no universally accepted definition, but does include several widely accepted tenets

or guiding principles. The next few paragraphs cover the three CRT tenets that will be applied to the review of literature.

First, CRT recognizes that there is an intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination, meaning that racism is such a central part of U.S. society that it is difficult to address various societal issues without also addressing racism (Solórzano, 1995). Some instances of racism can be done unconsciously (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), and having a critical perspective can open the door to question these subtle instances and offer different perspectives. Second, CRT addresses and rejects the idea of a colorblind society and policies. Colorblindness is problematic because it only addresses the explicit forms of racism and inequality found in society, institutions, and policy, while ignoring more covert forms of racism and maintaining the privilege of whiteness without accountability (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). This tenet allows the researcher to centralize issues of equity affecting students of color, and organize ideas towards the culminating point of the importance of assessment centralizing racial/ethnic equity in outcomes.

Third, CRT prioritizes social justice through challenging systems of meritocracy that work to maintain white privilege and blame racism as an effect of individual skills and motivations as opposed to systematic contexts (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). Related to social justice advocacy is an imperative to develop racial realists who understand and challenge the reality that racism is a vehicle which society uses to allocate opportunity, privilege, and status (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Assessment is not an unbiased process since it is ultimately done by people (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020; Henning & Lundquist, 2018). This tenet allows for challenges to potential arguments that assessment is somehow invalidated if it becomes contextual and subjective to student needs (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020).

Taken together, these three select tenets of CRT provide guiding principles through which to challenge, negotiate, interpret, and evaluate the literature—especially, but not limited to, how higher education, institutional, and assessment practices challenge or perpetuate existing systems of inequities, racism, and injustice, as well as the dominant rhetoric around certain issues, values, and norms in higher education, the field of assessment, and society. The legitimacy CRT gives to the lived experiences of people of color and the intentional focus it brings to issues of equity makes CRT a powerful lens to examine why assessment needs to be more equity-minded, question why the literature has not heavily called for assessment to embed an equity focus, and help center the Latinx student experience within both assessment and higher education.

A Brief History on the Field of Assessment and Its Evolution

As Peter Ewell states, for many institutions assessment has become "a condition of doing business" (1991, p. 75). In its beginning, assessment was primarily used as a tool for evaluation and testing; usually taking place in the classroom for academic measurement (Ewell, 1991). It was not until fairly recently that the scope of assessment has been broadened to include more types of information/data to inform evidence-based changes. This section will provide an overview of assessment in higher education from the late 1900's to its development into current times—including policies and practices which have defined assessment as its own field.

Assessment as a Tool for Evaluation

Assessment has been intertwined with higher education for over a century, though not always in similar ways as it is now. The main vehicle for assessment before the 1980's was through the field of evaluation. As Stafford Hood (2017) highlights in his exploration of the various stages in the history of evaluation, assessment of student learning was conducted

primarily through test-based learning measurements. In higher education, assessment primarily

served as a way to determine student capabilities. However, it was also used to evaluate the

quality of teacher education programs following the logic that students' test performances

directly correlated with the quality of teachers' education (Soar, 1973). It can be argued that

assessment began to make significant impacts in improving higher education through these types

of involvements with evaluation, especially during the late 1960's and 70's where evaluation

began to shift away from testing and more towards value claims about program effectiveness

(Hood, 2017). Beginning in the late 1970's, few institutions were beginning to have requirements

to provide quantifiable information on student learning (Ewell, 1991). However, this was far

from being a national movement and thus assessment was still mainly a tool of evaluation.

Kuh and Randsdell (1980) explain evaluation as a process aimed at informing decision-

making through collection and documentation of information aimed at providing a justification

for a program's termination or continuation. Evaluation is also defined as "an applied inquiry

process for collecting and synthesizing evidence that culminates in conclusions about the state of

affairs, value, merit, worth, significance, or quality of a program, product, person, policy,

proposal, or plan. Conclusions made in evaluations encompass both an empirical aspect (that

something is the case) and a normative aspect (judgement about the value of something). It is the

value feature that distinguishes evaluation from other types of inquiry…" (Fournier, 2005, 139-

140). The types of data collected depends on whether the evaluation is formative—aims to

improve real-time development through timely feedback—or summative—aims to inform

judgement regarding a program's effectiveness and value (Kuh & Randsdell, 1980; Westat

2010). In 1980, Kuh and Randsdell called for more sophisticated models of evaluation which

include guidance for those not familiar with evaluation and requirements for the quality of

information gathered through assessment, all the while also remaining attuned to the context in which the evaluation is taking place. As it turns out, the field of evaluation was already trending in that direction.

In the early 1980's, while the field of evaluation began to make significant strides in terms of emphasizing context-relevant evaluations focused around a more constructivist paradigm (Hood, 2017; Stake, 1975), assessment was beginning to become its own field making strides away from evaluation. By 1984, there were important conversations occurring in higher education regarding curriculum reform (Association of American Colleges, 1985; Bennett, 1984) which centralized the assessment of student learning and monitoring student development over time as an important element of curricular reform. Further, assessment was beginning to be talked about as a form of scholarship that could be applied across disciplines (Ewell & Cumming, 2017). In 1988, the U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett urged higher education accreditors to incorporate the assessment of institutional learning outcomes into their accreditation guidelines (U.S. Department of Education, 1988). These reports and pieces of literature in the mid to late 1980's cemented assessment as its own standalone endeavor embedded within the operation of colleges and universities.

Assessment began to shift from a tool mainly used for scholarly measurement into a tool of public policy to meet societal concerns and demands (Ewell, 1991). Thus, while the field of evaluation was beginning to take lessons from the Civil Rights movement led by the work of evaluators such as Robert Stake and African American researchers such as Asa Hillard, assessment was making inroads towards becoming its own field. As a result, perhaps of timing, some of the lessons permeating through the field of evaluation at the time did not transfer into assessment causing the latter to miss a crucial influx of equity-minded and race conscious

practices. The following section will explore how external calls for accountability created the environment for assessment to grow into its own field of practice.

Accountability: The Seed from Which Assessment Rose

In 1970, Leon Lessinger borrowed from management theory to define accountability as "the product of a process. At its most basic level, it means that an agent, public or private, entering into a contractual agreement to perform a service will be held answerable for performing according to agreed-upon terms, within an established time period, and with a stipulated use of resources and performance standards" (Lessinger, 1970, p. 217). The early calls for accountability in the late 1970s and early 1980s dealt with a trend calling for curriculum reform in higher education. Various reports published during that time span called for the use of demonstrations of learning—primarily test scores—to improve the curriculum towards student needs and ensure what is being taught is of good quality (Ewell, 1985; Ewell, 1991). This included calls from the federal government, state government, businesses, and accreditors for incremental measures of educational outcomes (Ewell, 1985).

As a result, assessment itself began to take center stage when it came to calls for transparency and accountability even as the accountability conversation changed from curriculum reform into ensuring that federal financial aid and funds were being received by— and being well-spent by—deserving institutions (Ewell, 1991; Ewell & Boyer, 1988). Due to this, by 1990 there were approximately 27 states that had active assessment policies and requirements for public institutions operating within their boundaries; and approximately 70% of all institutions were developing assessment programs (Ewell, 1991) compared to only a few dozen or so isolated institutions having assessment programs in 1983 (Ewell, 1983). These policies often included transparency requirements in the form of reports of college student

performance so that prospective students could compare student outcomes across institutions (Ewell, 1991). In addition, stakeholders were wondering how these outcomes data were being used or could be used by institutions for improvement (Ewell, 1985). Traditionally, assessment results were used to make assertions about students. Now, calls for accountability were seeking to use assessment results to make assertions about the curriculum and the institution. This took assessment from an internal process to an external one where both faculty and administrators had to own the assessment process in order to make improvements to teaching, learning, the curriculum, the program, and the overall institution then repeat the process to ensure those improvements worked; a proposition of shared-responsibility that made faculty uncomfortable (Ewell, 1985). Outcomes were not only being taken out of the classroom and causing the performance of faculty who might feel under the accountability microscope to be negatively impacted (Soar, 1973), but faculty also had to share responsibility with and answer to administrators who were external to the classroom. However, it made learning outcomes assessment a necessary and central part of any effort of institutional self-improvement at the curricular, program, and institutional levels. Nevertheless, assessment was still primarily about testing, and standardized tests were becoming the preferred tool for admissions and accountability (Ewell, 1991). Basic skills tests were used for admissions, placement, and developmental education requirements while state mandated tests were used to improve the teaching and the curriculum (Ewell, 1987).

Assessment as Its Own Field: A Growing Focus on Learning Outcomes and Improvement

Once institutions saw that the call for accountability and assessment was not disappearing from higher education policy, assessment began to really evolve. By 1990, the assessment conversation began to expand into discussions revolving around learning outcomes statements.

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The argument was that students cannot be purposeful about what they learn without faculty first

providing them with clear learning goals and objectives for the class or curriculum (Banta,

1993). Concerns about racial bias in testing and mindfulness of learning needs by race/ethnicity

were contributing to assessment's evolution beyond testing (Ewell, 1987). By 1997, the

discussion began to center around best practices for quality assessment. These conversations

began with the importance of learning outcomes statements to both communicate educational

values to students and to give explicit learning goals to assess to faculty (Banta, 1997). The

importance of accountability was not lost in these best practices, but more emphasis was also

being placed on actually using assessment results for change/improvement (Banta, 1997). By the

early 2000s, faculty and administrators tasked with carrying out assessment projects began to

critique the usefulness of standardized testing in meeting both accountability and improvement

needs (Klein, Kuh, Chun, Hamilton, & Shavelson, 2005). Arguments against standardized

testing, specifically its weaknesses and limited value for improving teaching and learning, were

being expressed by large numbers of faculty in both two-year and four-year institutions (Banta,

Black, Kahn, & Jackson, 2004). These critiques gave rise to more locally-developed forms of

assessment—such as course-embedded assessments, capstone projects, and portfolios—which

were more aligned with campus-specific improvement goals (Banta, et. al., 2004).

However, in 2006 the U.S. Department of Education published a set of recommendations

as the culmination of a year-long effort investigating ways to improve higher education, titled *A

Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*. Now, the report is more

commonly referred to as the *Spellings Report* since it was commissioned by then Secretary of

Education Margaret Spellings. In brief, the report offered six main recommendations to improve

U.S. higher education, including access and financial aid. For the purposes of this conversation,

the *Spellings Report* also called for greater higher education accountability and transparency, specifically through institutions reporting their 'value-added' to student learning so that colleges and universities can be compared to one another based on test scores (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). These accountability and transparency recommendations seemed to go against the predominant beliefs at the time about making assessment consequential through using more appropriate methods to gauge and improve teaching and learning. Some proactive faculty, administrators, and institutions saw the writing on the wall and created the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) aimed at providing institution-specific information regarding learning outcomes and cost so that stakeholders could make comparisons (Kuh, 2007). However, other responses to the *Spellings Report* were less yielding. Trudy Banta argued that following the recommendations of the Spellings Report to focus on testing students so that institutions can be compared with one another will not improve student learning (Banta, 2007). Banta argues that similarly to how "[j]ust as weighing a pig will not make it fatter, spending millions to test college students is not likely to help them learn more" (Banta, 2007, p. 10).

Comparability is concerning from an equity perspective depending on how it is used. Institutions are not similar, so context matters when speaking about outcomes across the higher education landscape. Comparing outcomes while ignoring other institutional contexts can place underfunded institutions at risk even through those institutions may be the best means of access into higher education by students of color. However, if these comparisons are made with an equity-minded perspective, having data which are comparable can help identify inequities and inform ways to resolve them. The danger lies in only using data to compare and punish institutions—and students at that—for their shortcomings without taking proper action to attempt to address those inequities through more equitable support. If institutions would only be judged

on the results of testing and those types of high-level metrics, then the improvement aspect of

assessment would be foregone as faculty would be unmotivated to continue conducting more

genuine forms of assessment (Banta, 2007). While accountability and transparency are drivers

for assessment, improvement—specifically finding ways to help students acquire the knowledge

and skills the program and institution value (Kuh, 2007)—is more aligned with activities seeking

to fulfill the mission of higher education and improve educational outcomes.

In recent years, the field of assessment has moved more towards this improvement

perspective. While conducting assessment to comply with accountability and transparency

requirements is still a main driver, there are more and more institutions conducting assessment

for improvement (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014). Kuh, Ikenberry, Jankowski,

Cain, Ewell, Hutchings, and Kinzie (2015b) cite compliance driven assessment as being

responsible for limiting the impact that learning outcomes assessment had on student and

institutional performance since 2008. The assumption being that a culture of improvement when

it comes to assessment would be more impactful since it would utilize more authentic forms of

assessment which would result in more significant impacts. In fact, this echoes similar critiques

and recommendations that institutions participating in the VSA provided to improve the

program. Specifically, a recommendation to "expand the number and nature of student learning

measures in order to more accurately portray student attainment and provide more useful and

meaningful information for multiple audiences" was made in order to move beyond utilizing

Spellings recommended standardized test scores to provide comparable institutional data

(Jankowski, Ikenberry, Kinzie, Kuh, Shenoy, & Baker, 2012, p. 3).

Now, institutions use multiple methods to assess student learning outcomes (Kuh et al.,

2014; Kuh et al., 2015a) using four different approaches on average (Jankowski, Timmer,

Kinzie, & Kuh, 2018), and more institutions than before are using assessment results for improvement (Jankowski et al., 2018; Kuh et al., 2014; Kuh et al., 2015a). Though using assessment data to make improvements—commonly known as 'closing the loop'—has been traditionally problematic (Banta & Blaich, 2011), these statistics on the increasing use of assessment are encouraging. There are even meta-assessment efforts taking place on college campuses aimed at assessing assessment efforts and their subsequent changes (Banta & Blaich, 2011). Multiple assessment frameworks and best practices have been developed and tailored for institutional and task-based contexts (Banta, 1997; Schuh, 2009; Suskie, 2009). Assessment has evolved from being a tool in evaluators' tool chest to becoming its own field tasked with documenting learning outcomes—including knowledge, skills, values, etc.—for the purpose of improving teaching and learning instead of for making value judgements based on test scores. Due to these developments, assessment has deeper implications now, perhaps more than ever, for how well colleges and universities can meet the educational needs of their students. While this is a great opportunity for assessment to have a positive impact on the educational experiences of college students, the opposite outcome is also true. The reality is that higher education has not only had historical troubles in providing access to students of color (Anderson, 1988; Eckel & King, 2004; Thelin, 2011), it also has numerous issues when it comes to supporting a diverse student body once they walk through the gates (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Assessment, with its current focus on improvement, can either improve these issues or serve to continue the inequities affecting higher education and students of color; as well as colleges' and universities' abilities to serve students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, immigrant students, adult learners, international students, students with special-needs, students who identify as lesbian, gay,

bisexual, or transgender (LGBT), etc. As a result, the field of assessment should be mindful over how it can impact equity efforts in higher education, both in positive and negative ways.

Learning Outcomes Assessment and Equity in Higher Education

Due to the space that learning outcomes assessment now occupies within higher education, assessment as a set of practices/methods and as a field overall has various social and policy implications for equity. The ways that assessment results are used to implement changes to the curriculum, department, and institution as a whole do not occur in a vacuum. There are various consequences, both intended and unintended, that also impact students. For example, over 85% of students now indicate that they enroll in higher education to secure a well-paying job (Bloxham, 2017). This is no surprise given that higher education provides the greatest means of upward social mobility for families of low-socioeconomic status (SES) (Rucker, 2016), as well as for communities of color that have been historically disenfranchised in U.S. society. However, the implications of securing a good job post-graduation are exacerbated by the decreased affordability of a college degree. Increased tuition and decreasing federal aid have given rise to loans as the main subsidy for a college education. Since students of color are disproportionately more likely to be low-SES (Del Rios & Leegwater, 2008; Li & Carroll, 2007), this has significant consequences for the loan burden students of color leave college with. In addition, student of color and low-SES students are more likely to be enrolled in less-selective colleges and universities where time-to-degree is longer than compared to more selective institutions (Stitch & Reeves, 2016). This is a situation that serves to perpetuate social inequality by limiting the financial benefits of low-SES students and of students of color. This is especially true given that students from highly selective institutions are poised to also make over a million dollars more in lifetime earnings than students enrolled at the least selective colleges and

universities (Soares, 2007). While this may seem as an issue affecting the overall system of higher education and beyond the reach of assessment, there is a way that assessment can help to remedy this issue. For example, there has been increased use of e-portfolios in assessment as a way to more genuinely measure student learning outcomes. Electronic portfolios are deemed to be the most authentic form of assessment since students themselves can dictate the content, portfolios can be assessed through the use of rubrics, and can be used to demonstrate to employers what skills students have acquired (Banta, 2007). The use of e-portfolios has been growing in higher education (Kuh et al., 2014; Jankowski et al., 2018). If assessment can provide ways for students to effectively communicate what they know and can do as an effect of enrolling in college instead of just collecting such information and using it internally, then the impacts of assessment can spread from improving teaching and learning to also improving the job prospects of all students. The use of additional assessment methods that offer increased agency to students, as well as practitioners giving increased consideration in how assessment results are used in terms of their potential impacts on equity, should be a requirement for all assessment projects.

In addition, assessment plans, measures, and processes have traditionally been developed by faculty and administrators *for* faculty and administrators. This way of doing business treats students as the object of the assessment and nothing more. That is to say, assessment is a practice that is done to students as opposed to being done *with* students. Continuing to carry-out assessment efforts like this will negatively impact student performance from populations that are already made to believe that they are 'less-than' in society. To exemplify this, Cuellar (2014) talks about how stereotypes and racism in society has negatively affected self-efficacy and locus of control in Latinx students. Groups of Latinx and white students were asked to rate their own

academic abilities and potential. As a result, Latinx students rated themselves lower on self-identified academic factors compared to white students (Devos & Torres, 2007). In addition, both Latinx and white students were more likely to rate fictional characters with Spanish last names as having less academic potential than fictional characters with English sounding last names (Devos & Torres, 2007).

Self-efficacy and locus of control, have significant impacts on student learning and overall cognitive growth (Pacarella & Terenzini, 2005). Self-efficacy deals with students' beliefs about their ability to influence outcomes both academically and in their personal lives (Bandura, 1994). Locus of control is the extent to which students believe they have a say in what occurs to them; a high locus of control means the student believes they have a direct say in their outcomes while a low locus of control indicates the students believes that outcomes are produced by chance and are out of their control (Rotter, 1975). Both of these terms comprise elements of student agency which this study will conceptualize as students' both real and perceived opportunities to influence their educational experiences and overall outcomes beyond their own performance in the classroom. Increasing student agency—not just the belief that students have the ability to influence their educational outcomes—in assessment can result in greater learning outcomes and improvements to teaching and learning. The fact that Latinx students held these beliefs about their self-efficacy and potential is concerning. Assessment can help mitigate these effects through being more intentional in the role that students play in assessment.

Finally, it is evident that learning outcomes assessment is already altered in certain institutions due to the student populations that colleges and universities serve. Assessment practices look very different in Minority-Serving Institutions (MSI) compared to predominantly white institutions (PWI) (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2015). In addition, while holding

institutional control constant, there are differences in assessment practices between the different categories of MSIs such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI), etc. (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2015). This means that institutions are already altering the way they conduct assessment based on the needs of their specific student populations. The issue is that these practices are the exception and not the rule. Most colleges and universities operate under the assumption that if assessment metrics and procedures are valid for 70% of their students, then it is valid for all students. However, if the remaining 30% of the student population is comprised of students of color, LGBT, low-SES, immigrant, adult, transfer, veteran, and international students, to name a few, then this system of assessment only serves to perpetuate inequality. Those in the majority continue to benefit while those that may be on the margins of society and/or college campuses may suffer. Initiatives such as the Equity Scorecard—a framework which aims to provide colleges and universities with better understanding on best practices to achieve equity in outcomes—challenges stances like this by highlighting how practices that are deemed to be unbiased and equal for all are actually working to disadvantage students of color while privileging the attributes more often displayed by white students (Harris & Bensimon, 2007; Bensimon & Malcolm, 2012; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Bensimon, Dowd, & Witham, 2016). Assessment, both as a field and practice, tends to treat all learners as being identical; ignoring lessons from various initiatives such as the Equity Scorecard.

Higher education research has already recognized the differing needs of all students; from undocumented (Kim & Diaz, 2013; Perez, 2010), adult learners (Macqueen, 2012), and LGBTQ students (Check & Ballard, 2014; Mallory, 2009), to special-needs (Froese-Germain & McGahey, 2012), students of color (Benitez, 1998; Tobolowski & Cox, 2012), and transfer

students (Backes & Velez, 2015). Assessment, though, largely operates from a stand point that all students are the same; that the same assessment process and its methods can equally serve all students. While this presumed objectivity in the assessment process/methods may aim to not discriminate and provide equal results, this is not what is actually being achieved. Equality in process (i.e. giving every student the same exam) is not equality of result (i.e. giving every student the same opportunity to demonstrate their true acquisition of knowledge). This is especially true if the context of where the assessment is being carried out is not given special attention. Regardless of the level at which an assessment is conducted (i.e. course, program, or institution levels), assessment cannot continue to ignore lessons from the field of evaluation in terms of the importance that the context has on the outcomes. If a program in a PWI is 60% Latinx while Latinx students only comprise 10% of the overall campus community, then the context of an assessment taking place in that program should be fundamentally different than an assessment taking place in a program that is 99% white. The same can be said for a course where student composition is 50% low-SES, 50% LGBT, 30% special-needs, 45% transfer, 40% Native American, 15% African American, 20% Latinx, 5% Asian American, 15% International, 4% two or more races, 1% white, 30% Muslim, 60% part-time students and so on. A context like this would require the use of intentional, explicit language, diverse ways for students to demonstrate their learning, intentional feedback loops to ensure all students are benefiting, etc. On the other hand, if a classroom is comprised of 100% white, male, heterosexual, Christian, high-SES, high-achieving, traditional age college students then they can all be assessed in similar fashion without much attention to differences in their needs, experiences, and opportunities. However, chances are that there are very few classrooms that look like the latter example and more that look like some derivative of the former. Explicitly stated, assessment needs to become more

equity-minded in order to limit its potential for negative impacts on equity and the success of a diverse student population. Otherwise, any improvements and uses of assessment results could be made to benefit the majority of students and further marginalize those that are relegated to the periphery of both society and college campuses.

Equity-Minded Assessment as a Way Forward

A call for assessment to become more responsive to different student populations is far from a new suggestion. In 1987, Ewell noted the need for assessment to be sensitive to differences between institutional types and student groups, and then again when discussing assessment at the community college level (Ewell, 2011). However, these have largely been comments said in passing instead of a concerted effort by a number of scholars and practitioners aiming to bring the importance of equity-mindedness to the forefront of assessment. Thus, while there are pockets where this type of assessment occurs, it is not widespread. Part of the problem is timing. At the same time when assessment began to become independent from evaluation, the latter field was becoming infused by numerous calls for cultural responsiveness. Evaluators were paying more attention to the contexts in which their evaluations took place, the cultural sensitivity of evaluators, and the impacts their recommendations would have on diverse constituents (Hood & Hopson, 2008). However, the only assessments which were being infused with these ideas were tests and exams, not the new ideas and measures coming to life in the larger field of assessment. It is time for assessment to embrace lessons from culturally responsive evaluation and adopt its various tenets into its own practice towards a more equity-minded assessment approach.

Culturally responsive evaluation traces its origins to Stake's (1975) conceptualization of responsive evaluation. In short, responsive evaluation calls for attention to actual learning

activities and outcomes rather than the intended ones, responds to stakeholder needs and requirements, and the value perspectives of stakeholders are consulted when making value judgements on the program and its outcomes (Stake, 1975). This type of evaluation is not concerned about evaluators' pre-conceived notions of success, but instead on what is actually occurring and how they are of concern to those affected (Stake, 1975). Responsive evaluation also encourages stakeholders to be involved in the process in order to make it more valid and impactful for stakeholders. MacDonald (1976) further contributed to the conversation around responsive evaluation through his conceptualization of democratic evaluation and the importance of being mindful of how evaluation benefits some at the expense of others, and influences the distribution of power and equity. In particular, democratic evaluation calls for providing equal voice in the evaluation process to all (MacDonald 1976; Hood & Hopson, 2008): people of color, men and women, those from low-SES backgrounds, special-needs, LGBT, etc. The final important contribution came from Ladson-Billings and the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). In essence, culturally relevant pedagogy calls for instructors to leverage student differences—primarily their racial/ethnic culture—as strengths that improve learning for all students. It is through these lenses that culturally responsive evaluation came to be. However, the cultural aspect of evaluation is about providing special attention to the cultural context in which the evaluation takes place—the explicit and overt rituals, norms, processes, composition, expectations, etc.—as well as the cultural context from which the evaluator originates from—including values, biases, and experiences—and what that means for their interpretations (Frierson, Hood, Hughes, & Thomas, 2010). The study takes the position that equity-minded assessment should be mindful of these elements of culturally responsive evaluation, and give significant consideration towards using

culturally responsive practices in equity-minded assessment (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017, 2020).

The 'Culture' Aspect of Cultural Responsiveness

Whenever issues about race/ethnicity are brought up in college campuses, the solution in most cases comes in the form of a 'diversity' initiative. The term diversity has become a buzz word under which to couple a multitude of problems affecting different populations of color without directly addressing race; making it easy to still apply color-blind solutions to problems of equity (Warikoo & de Novais, 2015). It is for that same reason that diversity initiatives seldom resolve the issue at hand in a timely manner (Newkirk, 2019). With that said, culture falls under the same pitfalls. Whose culture? What type(s) of culture? What does and does not constitute culture? Without an established definition, any attempt to put forth culturally relevant practices in assessment would hit a wall. Thus, it is efficient to have a working definition on how to conceptualize students' 'culture' for assessment.

Culture is not a simple construct, and it is by no means easily definable. It is subjective to the context in which 'culture' is discussed or observed. This is why it is important to bound a definition of culture. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) defined culture as "patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values" (p.181). While this definition begins to frame the understanding of culture as involving customs (i.e. beliefs and values) of a group of people and the observable way in which these customs are manifested, it is not a complete definition. Triandis (1996) further advances the definition of culture by calling it "a pattern of shared attitudes, beliefs, categorizations, self-

definitions, norms, role definitions, and values that is organized around a theme that can be identified among those who speak a particular language, during a specific historical period, and in a definable geographic region" (p.408). The inclusion of language, time, and region in the development of culture is important, but does not include aspects such as gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, etc. that shape the values, beliefs, and actions of people; which are essential aspects of culture. Carder (2015) offers three statements to summarize how others have viewed culture to mean: "[1] the set of predominating attitudes and behaviors that characterize a group or organization; [2] the sum of attitudes, customs, and beliefs that distinguishes one group of people from another; [3] a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a group or organization" (p.19). This definition inches closer to how culture should be thought of in a global world where important individual differences of people in a society may be disregarded or overlooked and result in miscommunication, the marginalization of an individual or an entire group of people, misunderstandings, or, worse yet, the perception by those in the majority population/culture that everything is alright when in reality it is not.

Informed by these definition and others, this study offers to define culture as "(1) the explicit elements that makes people identifiable to a specific group(s) including behaviors, practices, customs, roles, attitudes, appearance, expressions of identity, language, housing region, heritage, race/ethnicity, rituals, religion, etc.; (2) the implicit elements that amalgamate a group of people which include their beliefs, values, ethics, gender identity, sexual orientation, common experiences (e.g. military veterans and foster children), social identity, etc.; and (3) cognitive elements or the ways that the lived experiences of a group of people affect their acquisition of knowledge, behavior, cognition, communication, expression of knowledge, perceptions of self and others, work ethic, collaboration, and so on" (Montenegro & Jankowski,

2016, p. 8-9). Finally, culture should also be understood in terms of intersectionality, which is how the oppression of people of color is shaped by the interaction between their racial/ethnic identity and their class, gender, sexual orientation, etc. (Crenshaw, 1989; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Huber, 2010; Cho, 1997). This is because the cultures—the explicit, implicit, and cognitive aspects—of students interact with other aspects of their identity to impact their learning outcomes.

Cultural Responsiveness in Equity-Minded Assessment

Assessment efforts that are not mindful of students' cultures at every step of the process are in danger of privileging one way of knowing over others. The outcomes of the 'typical' student will be measured well, at the expense of those from students of color or students from marginalized populations. Since most institutional assessment processes and models such as the Assessment Cycle mention that assessment begins with drafting quality, explicit, and measurable learning outcomes statements, this, too, is the place where equity-mindedness begins in assessment (Suskie, 2009). The Equity Scorecard stresses that clarity in language is important when it comes to promoting effective equitable practices (Bensimon, Dowd, & Witham, 2016). Similarly, language is equally important when constructing learning outcomes statements since they are the goals that are being assessed (Adelman, 2015). It makes sense, then, for assessment to become more culturally responsive and equitable when it comes to learning outcomes statements themselves. To do so, the language in these statements should be explicit, intentional, and clear so that they are applicable to all students, there is no room for misinterpretation regardless of background, and they are written in a way that allows them to be measured. Research demonstrates that student learning gains in general education and knowledge

construction both increase when students clearly understand their expected learning outcomes (Gaston, 2015; Juvova, Chudy, Neumeister, Plischke, & Kvinotova, 2015).

The rest of the assessment process should follow a similar train of thinking in being equity-minded at every step of the assessment process. For example, there should be special attention to how different sources of evidence and methods of data collection can privilege certain student experiences over other. In analyzing and interpreting outcomes data, assessment practitioners should be weary of what the data say about different student groups and how different students groups have performed in these assessments in the past so they can identify if they are underserving certain populations. In implementing changes based on assessment data, practitioners should ensure that they have done everything possible to limit unintended consequences from negatively impacting certain student groups. All of this involves being intentional in how each step of the assessment cycle can be equity-minded and responsive to student needs through verifying that everything from language, methods, assumptions, and conclusions are not being done in a manner that privileges some type of student or demonstration of learning over others.

The context is important to acknowledge in equity-minded assessment (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020). Classroom, program, and institutional culture can all impact how students from different cultural backgrounds learn. If the contexts in which assessments are taking place are negatively impacting certain students, then it is important to acknowledge and attempt to address it before any measure of student learning is taken. Or else the validity of the outcomes assessment is questionable. The inputs to the assessment is the first half of the assessment cycle: the writing of learning outcomes and planning of the assessment process including who will be participating, which methods will be used, intended uses for data, and identifying how the

assessment will be culturally relevant. If these three parts are not done appropriately through equity-minded approaches, then the products, or outcomes, will be invalid for students that are not from the majority population.

Agency: Giving Students a Voice in Assessment

In order to further the impacts of equity-minded assessment, there should also be significant student participation in the assessment process (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017, 2020). Currently, students are bystanders in assessment; merely the object (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017). However, since students are an important stakeholder in how assessment results are used to make changes to their learning experiences, student voices must be present in the assessment process (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017, 2020). Agency is important to in this regard since including students in assessment can give them grater agency in their education.

This study defines agency as a combination of self-efficacy, locus of control, and opportunity. These three concepts combined give students the belief they can impact their education and take control of it through actual opportunity to do so. Self-efficacy is defined as a student's belief that he or she can has the capacity to control or influence events that impact their lives; including their motivation, learning, social circles, and behavior (Bandura, 1994, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Locus of control is the degree to which students believe they have control over their education outcomes and how self-directed they are (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Providing students with real opportunities to engage in processes that impact their educational experiences and outcomes can help students increase their feelings of self-efficacy and locus of control; thus providing them greater agency in their education. Increasing student involvement in assessment can be a valuable means through which to increase student agency.

Agency is important because students who score highly on measures of self-efficacy and locus of control tend to do better academically and report higher levels of educational development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The issue is that students of color are less likely to report high levels of self-efficacy and locus of control than white students (Devos & Torres, 2007), and this is partially due to the inequities, oppression, and racism present in society and higher education (James, 2020). Higher education has the duty to remedy these societal ills, and assessment can play a significant role in that through giving students more agency in their education. It is important to note that increasing student agency does not mean giving students complete autonomy and free reign over what they do, when they do it, and how they do it. Instead, it is about being collaborative and giving them a voice in the assessment process (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020).

Student agency can be increased by being intentional in how student input will be sought and included at each step of the assessment process. For example, learning outcomes for a course can be negotiated with students on the first day of class by having them interpret what the intended outcomes mean and clarifying them. Increasing student agency in assessment means asking student what they expect or hope to get out of the course and making alterations or additions to learning outcomes based on their input (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020). This can be taken to the program and curriculum level, as well. Another example can be in the data analysis stage. There is a lot of research on the many learning benefits that result from students having meaningful research interactions with faculty and staff; more-so for students of color and low-SES students (Hrabowski, 2014). Involving students in data analysis of learning outcomes for the program or institution level and asking for their interpretations on the results and intended use can help ensure that their needs are being met while also giving them valuable research

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opportunities. Many institutions are already doing faculty-student research experiences through capstone courses and experiences, so it is not a radical idea.

Will it take more work to achieve this? Almost certainly it will. But it is also worth doing. If higher education is about students and it is truly important for faculty and administrators to give every student a quality education, then there should not be an argument regarding the worthwhileness of conducting assessment in more equity-minded ways that also increase student agency. Students are judged by their learning outcomes, and colleges are judged by the learning gains they give to their students. It seems that this is a solution for improving both, while also fulfilling one of the aims of faculty members to effectively and responsibly teaching every student in the classroom. Hood and Hopson (2008) raised the point ten years ago that evaluators have not asked deeper questions in their evaluations such as "whose notions about what evidence matters most" are dictating the evaluation?; and "to whom does evidence matter most?" (p. 418). It is long overdue that the field of assessment begins to ask these and other related questions more often than not. It is long overdue for the field of assessment to provide avenues through which students can have greater agency in their learning.

A Focus on Hispanic-Serving Institutions

The term 'Minority-Serving Institution' came into existence after congress passed the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA); specifically Title III (Li & Carroll, 2007). However, a few colleges had long been serving communities of color; predominantly in African American communities. In order to qualify as an MSI, institutions must also be adherent to Title IV of HEA, meaning that they must also qualify to receive federal financial aid for their students (Li & Carroll, 2007). HEA created two distinct groups of MSIs: those that are given their MSI status through legislation and those that attain their MSI status through enrollment numbers of students

of color. Currently, there are seven types of MSIs which serve very specific student populations:

a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), Tribal

College or University (TCU), Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian-Serving Institution (ANNH),

Predominantly Black Institution (PBI), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-

Serving Institution (AANAPISI), and Native American-Serving Nontribal Institution (NASNTI)

(Higher Education Act, 1965). Of the seven MSI types, only HBCUs and TCUs are founded by

legislation meaning there cannot be additional HBCUs or TCUs created without congress

intentionally designating institutions as such. In fact, HBCUs must have been founded before

1964—the Civil Rights Act gave Black colleges at the time the recognition of 'historical'

institutions—with the specific mission to educate African Americans in order to be considered

and HBCU (Cole, 2011); all other institutions with high enrollment of African American

students are PBIs. Consequently, HBCUs and TCUs are the only institutions where their mission

is specifically tailored to educate, uplift, and matriculate their specific student population and

their communities. The remaining MSI types all attain their minority-serving status through

having specified proportion of their undergraduate full-time-equivalent (FTE) enrollment

comprised of a population of color (Li & Carroll, 2007) and a financial need component (Higher

Education Act, 1965). For example, HSIs must have an undergraduate FTE of at least 25% with

at least 50% of undergraduate students being Pell Grant eligible (Higher Education Act, 1965).

Thus, MSIs not only educate students of color but also low-SES students; two populations

largely disenfranchised when it comes to higher education and overall society. Currently, there

are 784 total MSIs according to the Rutgers Center for MSIs (2019).

While all of these MSIs are certainly deserving of further discussion, the focus of this

study lies solely on Hispanic-Serving Institutions. The reason these institutions were selected for

the study is two-fold. First, Latinx are the largest non-white populations in the country, and will comprise a significant proportion of expected population and college enrollment growth in the coming years. Second, while HSIs do have the added MSI mission, their institutional missions and founding values seldom change to include educating Latinx students upon receiving the MSI designation. For example, HBCUs all share a foundational mission to educate the student population they serve, but most HSIs attain that mission by chance. The MSI web scan conducted by NILOA in 2018 suggests that MSI assessment activities seem to align with their institutional mission. As such, it is prudent to analyze HSIs assessment practices while being mindful of the interplay between their institutional and MSI missions. This section will discuss HSIs with regards to their historical development over time, social impetus for their continued existence, issues and/or critiques, and contributions to the development of their students.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions

The history of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) differs significantly from that of HBCUs. For one, the history of HSIs is not nearly as long. While the 'creation' of MSIs came from HEA, it was not until the reauthorizations of 1992 and 1998 that HSIs were explicitly defined by congress and tracked (Cole, 2011; Laden, 2004). In fact, the majority of HSIs have come into existence ever the past 40 years, and the number has increased 130% from 189 HSIs in 1995 to 435 HSIs in 2015 due to changing demographics in the country (Excelencia in Education, 2016a). Only three HSIs were created with the distinct mission to educate Latinx students: Boricua College and Hostos Community College in New York, and National Hispanic University in California (Cole, 2011; Laden, 2004). Instead, HSIs have developed incidentally as the Latinx populace shifts across the U.S. Currently, there are 443 HSIs in the U.S. and Puerto Rico (Rutgers Center for MSIs, 2019). However, there are also over 300 institutions that are

regarded to be 'emerging HSIs' since they enroll between 15 and 24 percent undergraduate FTE Latinx students (Excelencia in Education, 2016b). While the latter institutions do not qualify for federal funds, the expectation is that within the next ten years they will be full HSIs. Given the large number of HSIs, these institutions are a significant part of the system of higher education. This is further proven by the fact that while HSIs represent 13% of all colleges and universities, they enroll the majority (62%) of Latinx students in higher education (Excelencia in Education, 2016a). Similar to how HBCUs are highly concentrated in the southern U.S., HSIs are also concentrated geographically in California (152 institutions), Texas (78), Puerto Rico (62), Florida (24), New Mexico (23), and New York (23) (Excelencia in Education, 2016). In terms of enrollment, Latinx students comprise less than half of all students enrolled in HSIs (Excelencia in Education, 2016b), which is a significant difference compared to the African American enrollment at HBCUs. If HSIs in Puerto Rico are taken away from that statistic, the average proportion of Latinx students at HSIs significantly declines, however (Cole, 2011). The large number of HSIs and emerging-HSIs in higher education are positive signs of increasing access to college for Latinx students.

HSIs have various benefits for Latinx students. For one, HSIs increase Latinx students' sense of belonging and cultural connections to campus which promote student persistence (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Relatedly, attending an HSI has been found to have positive effects on Latinx student engagement and self-perceived gains from their education (Fosnacht & Nailos, 2016). For Latinx students, enrolling in institutions with large Latinx populations and representation positively correlates with academic adjustment, positive self-perceptions, increased interactions between students and faculty, and belief in their academic potential (Dayton, Gonzalez-Vazquez, Martinez, & Plum, 2004; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996).

Perhaps this is why Núñez, Sparks, and Hernández find that being Latinx is positively correlated to enrolling in a two-year HSI compared to a non-HSI community college (2011). Finally, Solórzano (1995) found a relationship between Latinx enrollment at an HSI and continuing on to earn advanced degrees. However, while HBCUs have various data points on African American degree completion rates compared to other institutions, HSIs do not gloat such a large repertoire of Latinx completion statistics compared to PWIs. This is just one of the various concerns raised against HSIs.

With this being said, HSIs still have their issues. First, given that the vast majority of HSIs were not founded with an explicit mission to educate Latinx communities, but instead had that additional goal brought forth by chance, there has been a question of whether or not HSIs are truly serving Latinx students (Garcia, 2017). Upon receiving the HSI designation, the institutional mission of these institutions seldom changes towards a focus on Latinx students. In addition, there have been instances where traditionally white-serving institutions that qualify for the HSI designation do not apply for the funds in order to not be labeled as such (Contreras, Malcom, & Bensimon, 2008). The inevitable interpretation here is that these institutions would rather forego funding than to be seen as minority-serving by its stakeholders and the public. It is true that there are negative connotations to MSIs in the public eye due to problems stemming from lack of funding. However, this may also be symptomatic of how little importance some of these institutions place on educating Latinx students. A study of HSI missions and marketing materials revealed that the majority of HSIs tend not to openly promote their HSI designation, do not appropriately depict their high Latinx student body composition in marketing materials, and do not improve graduation rates for Latinx students over time (Contreras et al., 2008; Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Instead, undergraduate completion and retention rates for Latinx students at

HSIs and higher education overall have remained stagnant over the past 25 years or so (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Thus, while HSIs educate a significant portion of all Latinx students in higher education, they are not doing a good job at equipping Latinx students for success.

The potential for HSIs to greatly impact the lives of the Latinx community is still there. However, HSIs regularly use their Latinx enrollment to secure funding from the government, yet those funds are used to improve programs and supports that are more likely to benefit white and Asian American students as opposed to Latinx students (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). This questionable use of funds is troubling especially given that HSIs are among the least-resourced institutions and enroll a high proportion of low-SES and first-generation students (Cuellar, 2014). Research has found that student persistence and graduation rates improve as institutions spend more funds on their students, and lessened persistence is associated with lowered financial security (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). The funds HSIs receive due to their high enrollment of Latinx students could improve Latinx graduation rates if used for scholarships and other supports. If the institutional mission of HSIs were to educate Latinx students, then perhaps more urgency would be placed in fulfilling the goals attached to their MSI designation. However, it seems that most HSIs equate serving Latinx students as simply to mean increasing enrolling/access. Finally, one last troubling data point is that HSIs have been found to have lower graduation rates for Latinx students in STEM than students from other races/ethnicities in STEM also enrolled at HSIs (Contreras & Contreras, 2015).

The Realities of Latinx Students

The United States is expected to become a minority majority population by the year 2044 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). This means that people of color—or those who identify as 'non-

Hispanic white'—will comprise over half of the country's population. As such, it is reasonable to expect that the college-going population will also change to reflect this reality. Latinx high school graduates will increase by 44% from 640,000 to approximately 921,000 from 2017 until 2025 (Hussar & Bailey, 2017). As a result, Latinx students' college enrollment is expected to increase 32% from 3.2 million to 4.2 million by 2025 (Hussar & Bailey, 2017). Given the projected increase of 44% for Latinx high school graduates, does it mean that less Latinx students will pursue college in the future given that Latinx student college enrollment will only increase by 32% during that time? No. The fact is that the Latinx community has taken advantage of the limited avenues to higher education made available to us.

As Contreras and Contreras (2015) state, the issue for Latinx college students is not one that revolves around access to higher education. Currently, college enrollment is comprised of 14.5% Black and 16.5% Latinx, compared to 58.3% white (NCES, 2015). Though, it is worth to note that access to higher education, specifically the most selective institutions, is still a continuing fight for students of color. Latinx students have taken advantage of the availability of community colleges as their entry way into higher education. Núñez et al., note that Latinx students comprise approximately 16% of all community college students and 9% of enrollments in public four-year institutions (2011). While there are concerns that Latinx students may be overly concentrated in community colleges as opposed to four-year institutions, the larger issue for Latinx students is one of retention and completion since the six-year college graduation rate for Latinx students is 53% compared to 63% for white students (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). If approximately half of Latinx college students are not completing a degree, then there is a danger for these communities to become an enormous underclass in U.S. society with limited opportunity for social mobility. This concern is more daunting given the likeliness that the nearly

50% of Latinx college students who drop out without matriculation have acquired significant student-loan debt. Without a college degree, the odds are low that these students are able to repay those student loans and still advance socially, thus perpetuating a long-thriving system of inequality in the U.S.

The reality is that Latinx students tend to disproportionately be from low-SES backgrounds and be first-generation college students (Del Rios & Leegwater, 2008; Li & Carroll, 2007). The Schott Foundation (2009) has stated that low-SES students of color have approximately half of the opportunity to learn and attend the most selective and well-funded schools compared to middle-class white students. In addition, low-SES students of color are less likely to enroll in college than white middle-class students (Eckel & King, 2004). In terms of first-generation students of color, the reality is that due to the lack of cultural capital regarding how to navigate the entire college-going experience, Latinx students are more likely than white students to either enroll in the community college, undermatch their skills with that of their institution, or not enroll at all (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009). Undermatching is problematic because it places students of color who are qualified to enroll in highly selective institutions in less-selective colleges and universities. Time-to-degree is significantly less at the country's most selective institutions compared to nonselective colleges and universities (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). For students of color who are more likely to require student loans to fund their education, the added time to completion at less-selective institutions is limiting their economic returns on their degree. Time-to-degree is an even more pressing matter for Latinx students who are more likely to be enrolled part-time than other populations (Contreras & Contreras, 2015).

Given the changing demographics of the country and the projected increases in college-going rates for populations of color, the issues affecting Latinx students have very real implications for the nation's prosperity. If these trends of unequal access to selective institutions and non-completion rates for students of color persist, then the U.S. will have a minority-majority population that is mostly unprepared to meet the employment and economic demands of the future. While limiting education for people of color has been a preferred tool for oppression, the country is in a cross-roads between continuing on with its history of limited opportunity and access to resources for populations of color to maintain the status quo within the country, or finally ensuring that populations of color receive equitable opportunities and resources in order to maintain the country's status in the world's economy. It is the ultimate conundrum of interest-convergence. The largest population in the nation has to decide which interest is more compelling: its control of U.S. society, or its influence in the world. It is an impossibility to maintain both. If the status quo within the U.S. continues where students of color are still disproportionately low-SES, still affected by lower completion rates, and still unsupported on their journey to and through college, then the nation's economy will not keep up with that of other countries. Consequently, the influence the U.S. as a leading power will diminish. On the other hand, if more care, policies, and supports are given to ensure communities of color are uplifted and students of color go on to graduate college, then there will be an educated minority-majority in the country capable of meeting the economic and social challenges of the future. It depends on which interest is more compelling. The latter seems to be the obvious choice for a society that deems itself to be post-racial. Properly assessing students of color plays a crucial role in this issue. Exploring how HSIs equitably assess the learning of their diverse students, with

special attention to their Latinx students, is a worthwhile endeavor; especially if it can result in

best practices for other institutions to learn from.

Chapter III:

Methods

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the methods and procedures followed throughout the study. As a reminder, the study aims to develop an understanding on what motivates and supports equity-minded assessment at Hispanic Serving Institutions—which are highly-diverse institutions. Through such an understanding, the study aims to chart a path toward the context, environments, drivers, and supports that help to establish equity-minded assessment practices. This is increasingly important since equity-minded assessment can more adequately prepare colleges and universities to meet the needs of their current and future diverse students (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017, 2020). In this chapter, the three research questions guiding the study are set forth with justification as to why the research methods are appropriate for the questions. This chapter takes a deep dive into explaining why qualitative research methods—specifically a critical multiple case study approach—is the most appropriate method to answer the research questions. This includes an exploration into what a case study is, why multiple cases are used, and how a critical perspective is applied. Finally, the study procedures are detailed including the sampling process for each case and for individual participants; the data collection procedures followed for each case and the data collection practices which were common for both; an explanation regarding how and why this study uses different sources of data to build internal validity; and the data analysis procedure so the logic is clear for how themes and findings were constructed from participant data. The chapter concludes with an exploration into the role of the researcher and how this impacts the study, as well as how this study overcomes specific limitations associated with qualitative research and the procedures.

Purpose Statement

This study will provide insight into how assessment of student learning can be motivated to centralize equity into the assessment process and how that equity-minded assessment can be supported. The program-level experiences levied from this study explore how equity-minded practices can become sustainable, and advance thought leadership as to how students can benefit from and become central to an equity-minded assessment process. This study will build upon existing literature describing what equity-minded assessment is (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020) toward developing understanding of the environments and supports that help these practices take hold and thrive. The study will serve as a roadmap for postsecondary institutions and assessment practitioners who seek to implement more equitable assessment practices but either may not know where to begin and/or need insight regarding how to improve upon current assessment practices.

Research Questions

This study is guided by three main research questions. First, why do faculty, administrators, and staff involved in equity-minded assessment at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) conduct assessment work from an equitable perspective? This question first necessitates identifying places where equity-minded assessment is occurring. On top of that, it has the qualifier that the institutions where equity-minded assessment is occurring must be an HSI. The reason is that HSI's have very diverse undergraduate enrollments (Higher Education Act, 1865). It also asks 'why', so this question seeks to understand the motivations behind why different actors engage in equity-minded assessment practice. Thus, this first research question invites a deep exploration into very specific cases that meet the aforementioned criteria of engaging in equity-minded assessment within the setting of an HSI.

Second, this study asks participants to consider what role should undergraduate students—specifically students of color and those from populations outside of the campus majority—have in assessment? This question aims to understand what one of the assumptions undergirding this study looks like in the actual practice of those conducting equity-minded assessment. It allows for the exploration of how participants feel about student involvement in assessment, what their practices are as it relates to student involvement, what their reservations may be, and what their hopes are in regards to this topic. This question uses the word 'should'—a term which allows for the exploration of hypotheticals—in the framing of this question to allow for those who may disagree with this practice to offer their perspective. This also allows for participants to offer reflections of actual practice, exploration of opportunities, and advice that extend beyond their context regarding the role of undergraduate students in assessment.

Lastly, this study seeks to understand how could equity become central to the assessment of student learning in support of the success of students of color and those from marginalized backgrounds? By asking 'how', this question seeks to further the insights gained from the previous two questions by exploring the supports—processes, policies, and practices—through which equity is embedded in everyday assessment practice at diverse institutions. It elicits the understanding of how equity-minded assessment could become the standard assessment operating procedure and not something which requires special attention or additional effort. It also connects assessment as a mechanism which can support student success, and invites the exploration of how the former could support the latter. Arriving at a process of equity-minded assessment praxis is likely a journey instead of something which happens overnight. This question seeks to understand what that journey looks like for different actors as assessment evolved towards equity-minded assessment. In addition, this question centralizes the

conversation into one of student success, so it also elicits the relationship between equity-minded assessment and the grater goals of postsecondary education. Once again, by using the word 'could', this question also leaves the door open for study participants to go beyond their experiences and reflect on missed opportunities, dream about future directions, and opine on what this work could look like in other contexts. This question could yield useful recommendations for equity-minded assessment practice to advance the success of student of color and other diverse learners.

To summarize, the three research questions are as follows:

1. Why do faculty, administrators, and staff involved in equity-minded assessment at Hispanic-Serving Institutions conduct assessment work from an equity perspective?

2. What role should undergraduate students—specifically students of color and those from populations outside of the campus majority—have in assessment?

3. How could equity become central to the assessment of student learning in support of the success of students of color and those from marginalized backgrounds?

Independently, none of these questions can fully achieve the purpose of this study. Together, however, these research questions address the 'why', the 'what', and the 'how' as it relates to equity-minded assessment praxis; helping to paint a fuller picture as to the motivations, beliefs, and practices assessment practitioners carry with them when doing equity-minded assessment. Motivations alone cannot explain how a phenomenon is actualized. Beliefs alone are not enough to explain motivations to act since often is the case that we believe something *should* be done, but still fail to actually *do* it; or we lack the foresight, resources, and/or power to do something we believe *should* be done. Similarly, understanding the practices that support a phenomenon may not fully explain the motivations and beliefs that informed the

phenomenon. Together, these three research questions guide the study towards fulfilling its purpose of informing how equity-minded assessment efforts can be conducted to support the success of students of color and other diverse learners.

Research Design

This study follows a qualitative case study research approach. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain qualitative research as a process of inquiry that goes beyond the strengths of quantitative research—such as "determining cause and effect, predicting, or describing the distribution of some attribute among a population" (p. 5)—by instead prioritizing our "understanding [of] how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6). Qualitative inquiry is about understanding intrinsic elements of participants' psyche and actions—such as their meaning-making processes, motivations, beliefs, experiences, reservations, regrets, desires, interpretations, internalization of experiences, interactions with other actors, etc.—and how they all come together to influence their disposition towards and/or work in equity-minded assessment practice. To state it succinctly, qualitative research focuses on building holistic *understanding* of a phenomenon. A qualitative approach is most appropriate for this study because it allows for a fuller exploration of the research questions. In order to uncover the why, what, and how of equity-minded assessment, there needs to be a holistic understanding of the motivations and opportunities which led to the initial consideration, subsequent development, and, ultimately, the application of equity-minded assessment practices.

Part of its holistic approach to understanding, qualitative inquiry pays attention to the context within which the phenomenon occurs. Quite often, the context is just as important as understanding the phenomenon itself. In understanding the motivations and processes that

support equity-minded assessment, this study needs to also take into account the context within which these practices take place. To understand the processes and practices, there needs to be insight into the environment where practices were situated, facilitators and barriers to this work, and how opportunities could have arisen due to contextualized details.

Qualitative inquiry is a broad umbrella with various arms and approaches (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study utilizes a critical multiple case study approach to qualitative inquiry with semi-structured interviews in order to understand the phenomenon of equity-minded and student-focused assessment. The following sub-sections will provide an overview into these specific elements—a critical approach, the multiple case study method, and the semi-structured interview process—and why they are appropriate for this study.

Critical Qualitative Inquiry

This study's qualitative approach is 'critical' because it centralizes issues of (in)equity and (in)justice to challenge the status quo of how assessment is conducted in postsecondary education. Critical qualitative research assumes that "all thought is mediated by power relations that are historically and socially constructed" and "must confront injustice of a particular society" (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011, p. 164). Since assessment is conducted within postsecondary institutions nestled in the context of a larger society, it is carried out by people, and the results of assessment efforts can inform changes in opportunity for populations of learners, it is logical to infer that there is the potential for (in)justices to arise in the ways we assess student learning. With this in mind, the goal of critical inquiry is "to critique and challenge, to transform and empower" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 10). This study aims to transform assessment by exploring processes which go against the norm. Equity-minded assessment is not the norm in assessment, but it can serve as a way to challenge the status quo. It

can transform common assessment practice so that attention is given to issues of power and oppression. Equity-minded assessment can empower not just assessment practitioners but also learners of color or from marginalized populations by maintaining a student-focused approach. You cannot inform equity without viewing phenomena through a critical perspective.

Critical qualitative inquiry is research which actively seeks to create and inform change (Crotty, 1998) in order to reach more equitable and just outcomes. This study seeks to motivate change in assessment policy and practice so that assessment can function as a tool of justice, ready to meet the needs of diverse learners. This study, guided by critical qualitative inquiry, will provide the field of assessment with a compelling roadmap on how equity-minded assessment can be implemented and supported on diverse college campuses to support the success of students of color and those from marginalized backgrounds. To achieve this, questions must be asked which keep issues of equity at the forefront. Practices must be investigated and understood in relation to issues of power and oppression. Context must be understood and unique cases need to be explored.

The Multiple Case Study Design

A case study is a qualitative research method that requires an in-depth analysis of a given phenomenon through multiple sources of data, and utilizes case-based themes to draw conclusions and present findings (Creswell, 2013). A case study approach to qualitative research is distinct from other types of qualitative inquiry because the unit of analysis is the case itself instead of the phenomenon being studied (Stake, 2005). For example, if this study followed a narrative analysis design to understand the meaning behind the experiences of those practicing equitable assessment, then 'equitable assessment' itself would be the unit of analysis. This is not to say that case studies are somehow an indirect way to study a phenomenon. In case study

research, the phenomenon—in this instance equity-minded assessment—is still at the center of the study, but the phenomenon needs to be studied as part of a larger system in order to be holistically understood. However, a qualitative study qualifies as 'case study research' if, and only if, the phenomenon happens within a bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) where it is difficult to separate the phenomenon from its context (Yin, 2018). A bounded system means there can only be a finite number of people that can be interviewed and/or only a specific number of observations can be made and documents analyzed to understand the phenomenon of equity-minded assessment; the research cannot go on forever spanning innumerable participants or observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). The boundary for a case study can be determined by actors/participants, specific concepts, and even time if the phenomenon at the center of the study occurred during a specific time frame (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2019). In other words, to qualify as a case study, equity-minded assessment must occur within a clearly identifiable and limited number of actors, initiatives, policies, etc. which cannot be cleanly separated from the context in which these happen or have happened. Further, a case study approach is useful only when the research questions ask 'how' and 'why' a specific phenomenon occurs (Yin, 2018). This study meets all of these requirements.

In this study, the phenomenon of equity-minded assessment occurs within a bounded system. For one, equity in itself is a boundary as it serves to bound the practice of assessment within a specific approach. There are also a limited number of actors who advance this type of work within specific programs at Hispanic-Serving Institutions. There are only a certain number of participants who can be interviewed who are involved with equity-minded assessment. Thus, the focus of what this study explores, who this study involves, and the information this study seeks to understand occurs within a bounded system welcoming of a case study approach. (This

chapter further explores the decisions made on what/who to include and what/who to exclude in the sampling section.)

However, even within this bounded system it is extremely difficult to separate equity-minded assessment from the context within which it occurs because the motivators, the supports, and the actions related to equity-minded assessment are all dependent on the context where these practices are conducted. It is hard to imagine that these equitable practices happen in isolation from, are unprompted by, or are unsupported through something or someone else. Equitable practices may not happen if certain policies disempower people from implementing them after uncovering inequitable outcomes for specific students. Thus, the phenomenon of equity-minded assessment may not be understood in isolation to the context; it must all be understood simultaneously. There is always the chance that equity-minded assessment happens just because; completely unprompted. However, even in this scenario it is still important to understand the context that facilitated this unprompted initiative to be forward thinking and anticipatory instead of reactionary.

In explaining a case study research design, Miles et al., simplistically, yet beautifully explained the interplay between the phenomenon and its context by placing a heart in the middle of a circle; the heart is the phenomenon at the center of the study—i.e., equity-minded assessment—and the circle is the specific context which must be understood—i.e. the program which implements equity-minded assessment practices (2019, p. 29). Additionally, the circle represents the boundary of the case. Everything and everyone outside of the circle are external, or irrelevant, to the study. However, the boundary is not solid, but permeable since elements of the context can change which impact the phenomenon. For example, consider the chance that during the study a new policy which was important to the advancement of equity in assessment is

uncovered, and now the context must be expanded to better understand the policy, why it was enacted, and its impacts.

Why Analyze Multiple Cases?

A multiple case approach helps this study build a more holistic understanding of equity-minded assessment. While studying a single case can yield rich data about a given phenomenon, there are benefits to studying multiple cases. First, a multiple case approach can increase confidence in the findings, while also providing a stronger foundation to our understanding of how and why a phenomenon happens and carries on (Miles et al., 2019). By looking at multiple cases, findings can be compared and contrasted in real-time, which can also lead to richer data collection and analyses. In addition, differences between case characteristics and context can add richer discussions regarding variables which may influence equity-minded assessment. Furthermore, multiple cases can "strengthen the precision, validity, stability, and trustworthiness of the findings" (Miles et al., 2019, p. 33). If findings span multiple cases, then this can add more trust that what was observed is real and meaningful. On the other hand, if findings between cases directly oppose each other, this can also encourage further conversation and analyses. Contrasting findings between cases are not to be disregarded or taken as devaluing the study. Instead, it adds the opportunity to dive deeper into understanding why this contrasting finding exists. In short, multiple cases facilitate more understanding, which is the goal of qualitative research.

Some studies may choose to conduct a multiple case approach in order to increase the generalizability of findings (Miles et al., 2019), but this is not the reason why this study looks at multiple cases. For one, in order to generalize results, the study would have to include at least five data-rich cases (Miles et al., 2019). This study only explores two cases. While a goal of this

study is to inform, it does not aim to generalize results across the postsecondary landscape. Instead, this study uses the two cases to build a deeper understanding of the why, the what, and the how as they relate to equity-minded assessment. Because context plays a huge role in the exploration of a case, by having two distinct cases—and thus two separate contexts—within which equity-minded assessment occurs, a deeper understanding behind motivations, supports, and practices associated with this phenomenon can be explored. If findings hold true for both cases, or even if there are contrasting findings, then it allows for a deeper dive into which elements of the context played a role and in what ways. For example, there may be small, common catalysts or policies shared between the two cases which help equity-minded assessment practices thrive, but possibly could have gone unidentified if it were only one case showing these elements. As another example, analyzing data by participant characteristics across the two cases can allow for discussion beyond context and toward variables which can transcend case specific characteristics. A multiple case study approach has the potential to highlight additional findings that influence how these cases approach equity-minded assessment, and thus can better position the exploration of equity-minded assessment.

Building Understanding through Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews—specifically semi-structured interviews—are a central method for data collection in this study. Interviews are a seminal method in qualitative inquiry since they allow for the exploration of a phenomenon through the perspectives, experiences, motivations, and challenges faced by those living through, participating in, and/or creating the phenomenon. Interviews yield primary source data that facilitate *understanding*, which is the central aim of qualitative research. However, there are different types of interview approaches: structured, unstructured, and semi-structured. The first approach is the highly-structured interview, which

calls for there to be a pre-determined order for the questions asked; and for every participant to be asked the same questions in the exact same way (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Maxwell, 2013). Because of this, structured interviews may carry the loaded assumption that everyone answering the question understands and interprets what the question is asking in the same way (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Maxwell notes that a structured approach is recommended when the end goal is to make comparisons across participants, settings, or other variables for the purpose of understanding the differences between them (2013, p. 88). While a structured approach could help gain useful insights, the purpose of this study is not to draw comparisons or understand differences in participants' views or experiences. Instead, this study aims to build an understanding of how and why equity-minded assessment is conducted and what it takes to support it. Explorations of difference and comparisons across specific variables may be a part of data analysis, but it is not the most useful lens to build a holistic understanding of equity-minded assessment practices for the purposes of this study.

At the other end of the spectrum, an interview could follow an unstructured or informal approach, where questions are fully open-ended and potentially abstract (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Maxwell, 2013). The goal of unstructured interviews is to purposefully cast a wide net in regards to the information being collected. Often, these interviews are very free-flowing, conversational, and exploratory in nature. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) attest that unstructured interviews are best used for studies where (1) the researcher does not have much prior knowledge about a particular phenomenon; and/or (2) the researcher is using these interviews in conjunction with other concrete data collection sources such as observations or done in conjunction with more structured interviews. Since this study has a solid foundation on the topic at hand and seeks to create more in-depth understanding of a specific phenomenon, a fully

unstructured approach to data collection is not be the most appropriate. In order to answer the research questions, there does need to be at least some guidance and focus driving the interviews. This is especially true for participants who may be rich sources of data where questions must be focused and guided in order to get to the relevant aspects of their experiences, motivations, practices, perspectives, etc.

In between these two interview approaches lies the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews are not rigidly pre-determined in terms of the order questions will be asked, the exact language that will be used to ask them, nor requiring that every single participant answer the same exact questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, being less structured does not mean that interviews will be completely free-flowing, either. Instead, there are guiding questions the researcher develops before-hand, which help to bound the conversation with the participants; while also allowing the necessary room to explore related topics as they come up in conversation. Usually, there are specific data which are required from all respondents (where the structured element comes from), and other times data are required which varies by participants' roles or involvement with equity-minded assessment (which requires more flexibility). Semi-structured interviews allow for both rigidity and flexibility, as appropriate. As Merriam & Tisdell (2016) explain, "this format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 111) while ensuring that data relating to the core research questions are also collected. Semi-structured interview processes help the researcher focus less on drawing comparisons, and focus more on the specific phenomenon at the core of the study; focusing on building *contextualized understanding* and increasing internal validity (Maxwell, 2013). As such, questions are asked in ways that are appropriate for each participant and their experiences. For example, a question asking "How

does one assess equitably?" can be asked if a participant is best suited for providing exploratory, open-ended information. Alternatively, this same question can be tailored to be more specific—e.g., "As an administrator in student affairs, how do you ensure your assessment practices are equitable?"—if it is known that the participant holds focused experience with the phenomenon of interest.

For the purposes of this study, a semi-structured approach that allows for a focused, yet open-ended way to understand equity-minded assessment is best. In fact, most qualitative studies which rely on interviews as a data collection approach tend to follow a semi-structured approach. Semi-structured interviews allow for understanding of equity-minded assessment in the unique ways participants have experienced it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Speaking specifically about this study, considering that a case is a bounded system, the researcher must interview most—if not all—of the main actors in that case in order to holistically understand the phenomenon of equity-minded assessment. However, not all participants will have an equal, high-level experience with the phenomenon. Some will have a deep-rooted relationship with advocating for and conducting equity-minded assessment, while others may be tangentially involved. In instances with the latter, questions are asked in ways that are appropriate for the experiences the participant can actually speak toward. The semi-structured approach allows for the interview to focus on the specific elements of equity-minded assessment to which the participant can actually yield rich information instead of forcing participants to answer questions to which they can offer minimal insight. Semi-structured interviews allow for there to be useful data gathered from all participants. By having a guide of predetermined questions, the semi-structured interview approach helps ensure interviews are concentrated around topics central to answering the

research questions, while also allowing for additional exploration of supportive data that may not have been previously identified as being useful to the study.

Additional Sources of Information

Since case studies demand the use of multiple sources of information (Yin, 2018; Creswell, 2013) to build in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest, this study does not rely solely on semi-structured interviews for data collection. While interview data will be the foundation for analysis, this study also used documents and field notes to provide supplementary information. Since documents used in qualitative research tend to exist prior to the study, they are often used to provide sources of data which are not influenced by the presence of the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).This study analyzed physical and/or online manifestations of case-related records including institutional and departmental websites, data reports, promotional materials, meeting minutes, and other relevant materials. Document analyses can offer supportive or contradictory evidence to findings, or can provide further contextualization of the phenomenon of interest. However, since documents will often be secondary data created for purposes outside of the scope of this study, documents take a supportive role to the interview process. This study also uses field notes to inform understanding of equity-minded assessment. Field notes are primarily descriptive observations made by the researcher which can provide additional contextualized, supportive data to findings from interviews and documents (Yin, 2018). Field notes can include the researcher's personal commentary, reactions, and/or reflections toward the case environment, participant interactions, participant demeanors/non-verbal cues, random experiences while collecting data, and so on. In conjunction with semi-structured interviews, these additional sources of data can truly allow for in-depth, holistic understanding to occur.

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

This section provides an overview of this study's data collection and analysis procedure. Included are the sampling rationale for both cases and participants—a two-tiered sampling approach—and a description of the data collection process for each case. The data collection section discusses elements which were common across both cases—e.g., the interview protocol and data triangulation efforts—and describes the small nuances between data collection at each case. Then, an overview is given of the steps this study took to ensure that participants were informed of their rights and protected from undue harm. Participants candidly shared their experiences, views, and beliefs, to make this study successful. In reciprocity, this study took active measures to ensure their privacy is respected. In terms of data analysis, a robust overview of the coding and theme construction procedures is offered for all data sources. A discussion follows regarding the role of the researcher. This offers additional transparency toward the researcher's dispositions, perspectives, biases, and assumptions that may guide this study. Finally, the potential limitations that stem from the procedures and overall research design are explored.

Two-Tier Sampling

Sampling is the process through which a sub-section of a given population is chosen to participate in a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study has two populations and two samples: 1) the population of all the possible cases and its sample and 2) the population of all participants within each case and the sample of participants actually interviewed. This sampling method, which is common practice for most case studies, is called "two-tier sampling" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 99). In this instance, the case population is every program or initiative in Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) within which equity-minded assessment occurs. While it

would be undoubtedly useful to be able to study ever possible case, this would be a time consuming, and immense effort outside the reach of this study. As a result, taking a sample of the case population for the study's first sampling tier is the best course of action.

Due to this being a case study, there needs to be an additional tier of sampling to further make data collection and analysis more manageable. The exception to this secondary sampling tier requirement is when a case study observes, interviews, or analyzes *all* of the participants within the case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 99). Since those studies ensure they collect data from every person related to the case, they are essentially analyzing the entire population of that case. While it would have been ideal to interview every stakeholder in each case, the population was too large to effectively interview everyone; especially within the constraints of this study's resources. While a case is a bounded system with a limited number of actors, one can imagine the significant effort it would take to interview every student, administrator, faculty, and staff member who affected or was affected by equitable assessment. Not to mention the issues of efficiency that arise as data become saturated but interviews are still conducted to ensure the entire population's perspective is attained (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The opportunity cost becomes too great in that regard from spending an hour interviewing and then four hours transcribing the interview, but yielding little original data. It is more appropriate for this study to take a sample from the case participant population, as well, by identifying which participants can provide the best insights.

Following the logic above, this study treats the cases themselves as the first sampling tier, and the second tier is comprised of a sample of individuals who lead or have a significant role in equity-minded assessment within each case. In both sampling tiers, the sample of cases and participants within each case was purposefully selected. Purposeful sampling allows the

researcher the opportunity to select information rich-cases and participants; those who can provide the most useful data, yield deeper insights, and build more meaningful understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Maxwell, 2013; Creswell, 2013). By being purposeful regarding which cases are chosen in the first sampling tier, and also which participants are chosen for tier two, this study can gain the most relevant data from participants to help this study fulfill its purpose.

Sampling Tier 1: Case Selection

While attention toward equity-minded assessment in postsecondary education has increased, this work is typically occurring in small pockets within an institution. There are yet to be examples reported where assessment practices across an entire college or university are conducted with focus equity. This study sought examples of equity-minded assessment practices at the program- or departmental-level which can be sustainable even in the face of staff turnover and resource reallocation. Since the unit of analysis seemed to be the program, department, or campus initiative—which can all be bounded systems—it seemed appropriate to take a case study approach to understanding equity-minded assessment. Once this was settled, the next step was to identify possible case study sites.

With help from the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), a call was put forth through their networks—via newsletters, assessment and student affairs list-servs, academic conference presentations, and direct emails—for faculty, staff, and administrators in postsecondary institutions who were conducting equity-minded assessment to self-nominate their programs, initiatives, or institutions as prospective cases for this study. The call for case study participants referred applicants to a short survey asking them to explain what equity in

assessment means to them, how their assessment practices align with that definition, and to indicate how well their practices address elements of equity-minded assessment which align to how this study conceptualizes equity-minded assessment (e.g., using appropriate language, being mindful of student populations, involving students in assessment, and being mindful of systems of power and oppression) (the survey questions can be found in Appendix A). The call was open for two months from November 15, 2018 until January 15, 2019. Simultaneously, while the call for case study applications was ongoing, there were additional searches conducted by the researcher to identify possible cases. These searches included website scans of institutions' office of assessment, institutional research, and diversity, equity, and inclusion webpages for hints of equity-minded practices. These searches sought examples and evidence of equity-minded assessment by following the recommendations set forth by Montenegro and Jankowski (2017) regarding what equity-minded assessment practice consists of: the use of culturally responsive approaches in assessment, data disaggregation, varied examples of student learning, and the involvement of students in assessment. Strategic plans, rubrics, syllabi, department outcomes, assessment data and reports, assessment committee minutes, and so on were explored for hints of these equity-minded assessment approaches. There were scans of assessment conference programs—the 2017 and 2018 Assessment Institute, 2017 and 2018 AALHE Conference, 2017 and 2018 Drexel Conference on Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, 2017 and 2018 CREA International Conference, 2018 AIR Forum, 2018 NASPA Assessment and Persistence Conference—to see if any sessions were on equity-minded assessment practices occurring at specific institutions. These searches were quick keyword searches on conference programs for: equity, equitable, diversity, culture, responsive, minority, Hispanic, HSI, students of color, marginalized, inclusive, Black, Native American, Indigenous, Latinx, and diverse.

Other sources used to find possible institutions to include in the study were the assessment literature and websites of postsecondary assessment organizations. Finally, responses to NILOA's Occasional Paper 29 were analyzed to see if any respondent provided hints regarding equity-minded practices at Hispanic-Serving Institutions. The responses to NILOA's Occasional Paper 29 were important to explore since the white paper was the seminal piece that started the conversation on approaching student learning outcomes assessment with an equity lens in higher education. These guest responses penned by assessment thought leaders offered critiques, examples, and ways to expand the conversation on what equity-minded assessment should include. As such, these responses seemed like a good starting point in identifying cases that may fit the study's purpose. Any examples found during this supplemental search that aligned with the study's purpose were contacted and invited to complete the call for case study applications survey to get additional information on their practices, and to see if they align with the scope of the study.

In reviewing the survey responses, there were various inclusion and exclusion criteria which informed whether an institution was an appropriate sample for this study. There were four specific inclusion criteria, and the first two were used to determine whether more information would be gathered from a prospective case. First, prospective cases must have demonstrated elements of equity-minded assessment practices—either by approaching assessment from an equity and/or social justice perspective or by using assessment to advance issues of equity, social justice, and/or special interests for specific student populations. In order to be included in this study, the phenomenon of equity-minded assessment needed to be demonstrated.

Second, prospective cases must be located within an accredited postsecondary institution in the United States which is also recognized as a Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) in

accordance with Title III of the Higher Education Act (1965). This criterion is in place to ensure that equitable practices are happening within institutions that have a diverse undergraduate student enrollment. HSIs are among the most diverse institutions in postsecondary education (Excelencia in Education, 2016b) and have a special mission to educate Latinx students. However, they are not founded with the mission to educate Latinx students, but acquire the designation as enrollment trends change; which is a reality that many institutions may contend with in the future as enrollment trends diversify (Hussar & Bailey, 2017). As such, focusing on HSIs allows for 1) the assurance that prospective cases are located within institutions with diverse student body; 2) an exploration of the role of institutional mission and/or leadership play in this work; and 3) a contextual element similar to what other institutions may currently, or soon, find themselves.

Third, in order to be included in the study, equity-minded assessment practices must have either been in place for at least one academic year, or have a viable plan to sustain them for the long-term. This helps to ensure that equity-minded assessment practices have had time to establish themselves or are going to be sustained. Finally, prospective cases must demonstrate that equity-minded assessment involves various sources of evidence, and evidence is used to inform changes that address inequality. That is to say, evidence of student learning must be actionable and used to inform changes that improve teaching and learning. These four criteria help ensure that prospective cases yield the most appropriate information to meet this study's goals and holistically understand equity-minded assessment. In the same breath, only meeting these four criteria may not be enough. Prospective cases also need to pass a few exclusion criteria before being included in the study.

In terms of exclusion criteria, there were three main elements which would disqualify a prospective case. First, equity-minded assessment cannot be the effort of only one or two people. In order to be sustainable, this work needs to be led by a collective of individuals who are vested in the success of the program or initiative. Second, the prospective case must be clearly identifiable and bounded. In other words, prospective cases must demonstrate coherent connection between individuals involved and how practices align to both the program/initiative's goals and the purposes of equity-minded assessment. A case where equity in assessment happens here and there without any connection, or too many people are named as actors but have no common initiative bringing them together would be difficult to bound and study. Third and final, equity-minded assessment practices cannot appear superficial or vague. If the prospective case does not express their practices well or their conceptualization of equitable assessment is superficial at best, then they may not be able to yield useful information. These exclusion criteria helped to ensure the selection of the two most appropriate cases.

To determine whether prospective cases pass all of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, survey respondents which yielded promising answers and met the first two inclusion criteria were contacted via email, and asked for written follow-up information to learn more about their equitable assessment practices. These questions were tailored to expand upon their original survey responses, but the goal was to ensure the case met the additional inclusion criteria; and did not contain elements that would exclude it from the study. These follow-up questions also provided further understanding on the focus, scope, and goals of the initiative or program which uses equity-minded assessment. In total, there were 17 completed case study applications, 15 of which came from the NILOA and CAS supported call for applications. From these, only four were asked for additional information. In the end, only three cases passed all of the inclusion and

exclusion criteria and the two most promising cases based on their responses and findings from exploring their websites were chosen: Midwest University (MU) and West Coast University (MCU).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) note that studies looking into multiple cases must ensure that the cases are somehow "categorically bound together" by sharing "a common characteristic or condition" such as "examples of a phenomenon" (p. 49). It is also beneficial to have cases which can provide differing contexts and take different approaches to the phenomenon in order to offer a more holistic understanding (Yin, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The inclusion and exclusion criteria ensure these cases are categorically bound together while providing examples of equity-minded assessment. At the same time, Midwest University and West Coast University have enough contextual and procedural differences to provide a more holistic understanding of equity-minded assessment. An in-depth look at the characteristics and context of these two cases will be offered in Chapter 4 as part of data analysis.

Sampling Tier 2: Participant Selection

The purposeful sampling process to select interview participants was very similar for both Midwestern University and West Coast University. First, each case had two key participants who served as the main points of contact for their case. These four key participants were the main respondent for the call for case study applications survey and the secondary point of contact identified in the survey. These key participants have in-depth knowledge and high-level involvement in their case's equity-minded assessment practice. Upon being notified via email that they would serve as case study sites, a phone call was organized between the researcher and the two main contacts at each case. The phone call served to communicate additional details regarding the purpose of the study, further explain the logic behind the study's main research

questions, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria for additional interview participants. The researcher expressed the need for potential interview participants to have an important role or responsibility within the case and its equitable assessment practices. In addition, each potential participant must hold information or a perspective others in the case might not provide. In other words, they must be rich sources of data and/or have unique perspectives/experiences. Participants should not be considered for interviews if they were 1) outside the boundaries of the case; 2) only tangentially involved in the case or have insights which could undoubtedly be gathered from someone more fitting; and 3) involved with the case or equity-minded assessment for less than two months. These three exclusion criteria made sure time was not spent speaking with someone who may only offer minimally relevant data.

The reason the two main contacts for each case needed to know the inclusion and exclusion criteria was that this study utilized snowball sampling to identify additional participants. Snowball sampling is a type of purposeful sampling where key participants purposefully chosen for the study help the researcher identify other participants who can be rich sources of information that provide in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Compared to the researcher, the two main contacts for each case have a better understanding of who is involved and to what capacity. Thus, the study relied on the guidance of the main contacts to develop the second tier sample. The researcher stressed that there was not a maximum or minimum number of interview participants desired for each case. Instead, the goal was to interview as many participants as it would take to attain an in-depth understanding of the motivators, practices, and challenges towards equity-minded assessment within each case. The researcher did express the requirement to include the perspectives of faculty, staff, administrators, and students in order to ensure the study reflects all of their

experiences and is not swayed by one single perspective. In addition, the researcher suggested possibly including the voice of someone within the case who may share contrasting views or who may have been a skeptic. The goal of this is to potentially raise issues the researcher had not previously considered and could ask others to elaborate on.

The two main points of contact for each case created a preliminary list of potential participants, which was shared with and explained to the researcher. The researcher did some minor vetting of the participants through online searches to learn a bit more about the experiences and institutional role(s) of each potential participant. This also included research to determine if anyone not on the list appeared to have significant involvement in the case and should be added. For both cases, the rationale for including each participant was sound, and the researcher did not make any subsequent suggestions to add or remove any participants. In total, a sample of 37 interview participants was gathered. Twenty of these participants are from Midwest University, and 17 are from West Coast University.

Table 1
Number of Interview Participants by Institution, Role & Characteristics

Participant Characteristics		Midwest U	West Cost U	Total
Institutional Role				
	Faculty	4	2	6
	Staff	3	3	6
	Administrator	11	10	21
	Student	2	2	4
Department				
	Academic Affairs	12	11	23
	Student Affairs	6	4	10

Table 1 (cont.)

Gender

	Male	6	6	12
	Female	14	11	25
Race/Ethnicity				
	White	12	11	23
	Latinx	5	6	11
	African American	2	0	2
	Southeast Asian	1	0	1

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was very similar for both Midwest University and West Coast University, but there were important procedural distinctions this section will highlight. This section will first address the common data collection processes between both cases. This includes an explanation of the different sources of evidence this study uses to strengthen the findings. Then, this section concludes with a discussion of the respective data collection procedures for Midwest University and then for West Coast University. The overarching goal of this section is to provide a better understanding of the exact mechanisms through which the data that inform the findings of this study were collected.

The Common Interview Process

The researcher traveled to both case locations, setting apart four full days for on-site data collection. The rationale was that the first day would allow the researcher to explore the case's physical space and the larger institutional environment. Interviews would take place over the course of the second and third day, and a fourth day would be available in case someone needed

to re-schedule, or more data were needed to understand elements of the case or explore emerging themes. The researcher arrived into each case city early in the morning of the first day and left late in the evening of the fourth day. In addition, it is important to note that while most of the data collection took place during the case visits, the data collection began during the calls for equity case study participants, the planning calls with the two main case contacts, and resources shared from case study participants prior to arriving at the case site. These interactions produced useful documents, context for the case, and other supporting information. By far the most salient data collection occurred during the two days of interviews at each case. The researcher specifically wanted to conduct in-person, semi-structured interviews to build stronger rapport with participants, be able to fully note non-verbal cues, and make the conversation more personal. Between most interviews, there were breaks scheduled (either 15 minutes, 30 minutes, or a full hour) to allow the researcher to reflect, write memos, observe the case's space, and travel between interviews when necessary (a sample interview schedule for a site visit is included in Appendix B). At the end of each site visit, the researcher debriefed with one or both of the main case contacts. This allowed for reflection, to revisit the interview participant list to address gaps in the data if necessary, and to provide useful insights that may help improve future assessment processes of the case itself.

Each interview followed a semi-structured interview protocol to allow for deeper contextual understanding of the processes (Maxwell, 2013) that led to equity-minded assessment. Due to the nature of semi-structured interviews, there were a broad mix of question styles posed to participants. For example, since the goal of the study is to build understanding, there were interpretive questions asked of participants which would involve the researcher posing participants' answers back to them to make sure the answers were understood correctly; and then

asking participants to elaborate. Also, since the study uses a critical lens, the researcher would challenge responses to how they relate to systems of power and oppression, and push participants to think about issues of equity whenever appropriate. Furthermore, interviews included hypothetical and devil's advocate style questions to evoke participant's personal feelings and consider different perspectives on the case, equity-minded assessment, and other related topics. However, the foci of these questions depended on the conversation.

There were be 8-10 pre-determined questions the researcher wanted to address with each participant (four of those being warm-up questions that everyone answered which will be discussed in the next paragraph), and there would be additional questions spontaneously (an average of 6) derived from the conversation. The order in which questions were asked was highly variable, too, because it depended on when it seemed most appropriate to ask without disrupting the flow of the conversation. So, a question may have been #5 on the interview guide, but it may have been asked as the 13th question of the interview.

The full list of possible interview questions comprising the interview guide were vetted by the doctoral dissertation committee's director of research prior to data collection, and approved by IRB. An overview of possible interview questions was also given to the two main contacts at each case for feedback, context, and to help identify participants. This verification helped ensure the interview questions truly addressed the main research questions. Additionally, verifying the interview questions ensured they were appropriate for both the goals of the study and for the knowledge and experience held by case participants. Without this verification, the interview questions may not have gotten to the heart of the study's purpose. The sample interview protocol can be found in Appendix C.

Each interview began by the researcher ensuring that participants understood their rights and the purpose of the study. During this time, as well, participants gave their consent to participate, and had the opportunity to ask questions before beginning the interview. This typically lasted five minutes. The interview itself always began with the same warm up questions for every participant in order to get participants comfortable with being interviewed. For example, participants were asked to 1) describe their role within the case, 2) explain assessment and how assessment ties into their role, 3) define what equity means to them; and 4) what equity in assessment means to them. These questions also helped to prime the topic at hand into the forefront of participants' minds. After these initial warm-up questions, the researcher always took a couple of minutes to affirm their responses, offer how the study views these issues, and ask a follow-up question about an experience or concept they mentioned to begin to make the interview feel connected and conversational; and to hopefully make the participant feel heard.

The questions asked after the warm-up round varied by participant to ensure the questions which were most appropriate for someone in their role were asked. For example, a participant who's main role in the case is to analyze data and create data reports would not be asked about culturally responsive pedagogy. However, this is not to say that each interview had a completely different focus. There was a great deal of overlap between questions asked from one interview to the next since the interviews focused on equity-minded assessment. There were only three or four questions which were fundamentally different between interviews, and all the other questions were similar in nature; with just the ways in which they were asked being tailored to the conversation being had. At the end of each interview, participants always had another opportunity to ask questions to the researcher, and were encouraged to follow-up after the interview if any questions came up. Participants left with a copy of their informed consent form

and the researcher's business card to make sure they had the necessary contact information if follow-up was needed.

The study utilized a mixture of one-on-one and group interviews. In total, there were 17 of the former and 11 of the latter for a total of 28 interviews. Of the 28 interviews, only 3 could not be conducted in-person during the time of the visit: two student interviews which had to be conducted via video call for West Coast University and an administrator interview which had to be conducted via video/phone call at Midwest University. Nine of the group interviews had only two participants. The other group interviews had three and six participants, respectively; the latter of which was conducted as a focus-group and will be elaborated upon when discussing data collection at West Coast University. Not counting the initial five minutes to review participant's rights, offer an overview of the study, and the opportunity to ask questions to the researcher, the average interview length was 39 minutes across both cases. The shortest interview was 25 minutes and the longest interview was 62 minutes. Group interviews tended to last longer with an average time of 40 minutes compared to 36 minutes for one-on-one interviews. All interviews were voice recorded with permission from the participants in order to ensure that no details were lost. Recording the interviews also allowed the researcher to focus less on note-taking and more on the participant responses and non-verbal cues. This facilitated a truly conversational tone to the interviews, and allowed the researcher to better engage with participant responses; especially points of contention/apprehension and points of excitement. This does not mean that the researcher did not take any notes, quite the contrary. There were still notes taken, but they were more focused as opposed to attempting to write down everything the participant was saying. This was beneficial because the researcher approached each interview from a romanticized stance.

A romantic approach to interviewing aims "to generate the kind of conversation that is intimate and self-revealing" (Roulston, 2010, p. 56). However, this often involves the researcher showing their biases to participants and "mak[ing] no claim to being objective" (Roulston, 2010, p. 58). To limit the impact of the researcher's biases, the researcher made it obvious that this phenomenon was a matter of both professional and person interest, and expressed encouragement, praise, and concern whenever necessary in response to the insights shared by participants. This helped to build rapport with participants and get them more comfortable; hopefully feeling like they were speaking to someone who truly wanted to understand instead of making judgement claims about their practices, beliefs, and experiences. In addition, since the researcher shows they care about equity-minded assessment, this can perhaps bring an added level of importance to the conversation so the participant offers more in-depth and thoughtful responses as opposed to speaking with someone who seems impartial, disconnected, and treats the interview as a process from one question to the next without flow, acknowledgement of answers, nor personal investment in the phenomenon.

To minimize how the researcher's biases impact the discussion and the data being collected, participant responses were always listened to from an impartial stance. Follow-up questions were asked to challenge participants—similarly to how those skeptical of equity-minded assessment might—and get them to think about different perspectives. The researcher was conscious to not prime or guide participants to answer in any which way, and certain questions were often repeated from a different stance/perspective later in the interview to ensure the participants' true experiences and beliefs were expressed. Finally, when making notes, memos, and reflecting on the interviews, this was done from a subjective stance which ignored the researcher's predispositions to the topic at hand and really dive deeper into the content

divulged by interview participants to understand what has been said, what may still need to be understood, and make potential connections between the data.

Data Triangulation

In addition to interviews, this study supplements its data collection efforts with additional sources of evidence. Most qualitative studies utilize what is commonly referred to as data triangulation (Fielding & Fielding, 1986) to combat validity threats and biases stemming from one specific method of data collection (Maxwell, 2013). Triangulation is a strategy that qualitative researchers rely on to raise a study's credibility and/or internal validity in regards to its findings actually being accurate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The underlying logic behind this is that varying the sources of data can provide a system of checks and balances where the biases and limitations of one method can counteract those of another. If all sources arrive at similar conclusions, then it allows the study's findings to rest atop of a more secure epistemic foundation. The main benefit, however, is that different sources of evidence can also provide a more expansive or complementary understanding of equitable assessment by adding more context to the information divulged through each source (Greene, 2007). For example, a memo can add insights on the nonverbal cues of an interview participant which can change the tone and understanding of a specific quote, a photograph can provide richer contextual understanding to the environment in which a phenomenon occurs, or the contents of a document can broaden the implications of the experiences shared by interview participants. As Merriam & Tisdell (2016) explain, "what someone tells you in an interview can be checked against what you observe on site or what you read about in documents relevant to the phenomenon of interest" (p. 245). In essence, data triangulation allows for more holistic understanding of the cases and equity-minded assessment, which directly supports the purpose of this study.

In terms of differing sources of data, various interview participants for both cases provided documents and data reports that added deeper substance to their interview responses. These documents and reports range from statistics on student outcomes attainment, to data informed changes to recruiting materials, financial aid award letters, and syllabi. It was a wide breath of documents willingly shared by participants from both cases. The majority of these documents were already existing pieces of information developed prior to the study, but in a few instances data reports were pulled specifically at the request of the researcher. This study also utilized field notes and memos written by the researcher while conducting interviews, observing the institutional context, reflecting on interactions, and so on. These field notes help to supplement the interviews by providing additional context to the data gathered. For example, description of spaces and contexts, notes about interviewee demeanor and nonverbal cues, and emerging themes can all add additional context to interview and document data. With this same goal in mind, the researcher also took photos of the environment and specific settings to provide additional context and evoke memories during data analysis. These photos included classrooms, decor, offices, common areas, resources, and other elements which seemed relevant to understanding the context of each case. Finally, this study also utilizes secondary data, specifically data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) about each case institution. The purpose of secondary data is to provide supplemental evidence to what was provided by case participants, and to also gather information on the larger institutional context where the case exists. All of these additional sources of data help provide a deeper understanding of the case, which in turn helps advance the purpose of this study.

Data Collection at Midwest University

Data collection at Midwest University took place on April 29-May 1, 2019, with the researcher arriving to the case city the morning of April 29 and departing the evening of May 2. Data collection for this case had a few key differentiated elements when compared to West Coast University. For one, the researcher spent the first day (April 29) collecting data from the institution's website, and commuting to the institution as most students and some faculty, staff, and administrators would. While the researcher could not explore the physical space within the institution during this time, the researcher did explore the space surrounding the institution, and familiarizing himself with elements students, faculty, staff, and administrators have to navigate. Second, all of the interviews took place in only two rooms. During the first day of data collection, all interviews took place in the same multipurpose room which has special meaning for the case. It was the same room where planning and instrumental decisions were made which opened the door for equity-minded assessment to take place at Midwest University's program of interest. In addition, that room was where curriculum redesign efforts occurred, assessment plans were developed, and most of the team meetings take place for the program. It also serves as a classroom, a meeting space for students, and a study area since the room can be divided and reconfigured in various ways. This room was filled with technology and students' self-expression in the form of hand written inspirational quotes and removable graffiti on the walls; both of which are encouraged by faculty and staff for students to responsibly and respectfully partake. The second day of data collection was in a large conference or breakout room which can be considered to be a more traditional space. The room had two main rows of long tables spanning across its length. A large projector screen was at one end of the room with

teleconferencing speakers at various tables. All of the interviews took place in either of these two rooms.

Supplemental data in the form of observations and memos regarding the environment and context had to come with a guided tour of the space. I required access to navigate into different areas of the university, and thus had to be accompanied to wander significantly from each central interview location. There were opportunities to wander the halls in-between interviews and observe spaces close to each room, but nothing too extensive beyond that. Thus, memos and observations largely came during a guided tour of spaces which may be of interest to the study. This occurred at the end the second day of data collection.

Interviews at Midwest University lasted an average of 38 minutes—one minute shorter than the overall average—with the shortest interview lasting 25 minutes and the longest being 62 minutes (these times exclude the initial five minutes of explaining their rights to participants, acquiring informed consent, and reviewing the purpose of the study). There were a total of 16 interviews conducted at Midwest University, with 9 being one-on-one interviews and 7 being group interviews. All of the group interviews at Midwest University were done in pairs. One interview was conducted through video since the participant could not make it into the office on that day; in fact, that interview concluded over the phone due to technical issues with the video call. All of the other interviews were in person. The average duration of group interviews was 40 minutes, and the average duration of one-on-one interviews was 33 minutes. Those who were in group interviews had very similar or complimentary roles in the case. Conducting the interviews as a group allowed for ideas, initiatives, and motivators to be juxtaposed, compared, and elicit additional perspectives in real-time. If these interviews had been conducted individually, then there could have been a lot of repetition and data saturation. By combining them, it allowed for

both participants to refrain from repeating what the other person said, but instead build upon it or offer a different perspective. In addition, participants who were paired into group interviews were already comfortable with working together. This element is crucial because having the participants already comfortable with the other person in a group interview allows for the participants to be less guarded and more open to sharing. Pairing participants in group conversation with someone they are unfamiliar with could add another layer of apprehension since they are also unfamiliar with the researcher. The experience and emerging themes identified during the data collection at Midwest University influenced the procedures of data collection at the second case: West Coast University

Data Collection at West Coast University

Data collection at West Coast University took place May 12-14, 2019. Arriving a full day prior to the first interview scheduled for the morning of May 13 allowed the researcher to explore the physical space and surrounding environment of the institution. This allowed for observation which yielded understanding to the context within which students, faculty, administrators, and staff have to operate. In addition, during this first day, the researcher collected data and documents from the institution's website with relevance to the case. The researcher departed the case city the evening of May 15 just in case interviews needed to be rescheduled or there needed to be follow-up conversations and data collection that morning (which was not the case). For the interviews conducted during May 13-14, the researcher learned from the limitations associated with conducting interviews from only two spaces like at Midwest University. Thus, interviews at West Coast University took place in many different places; including participants' offices, meeting rooms, and classrooms. Conducting interviews in this manner allowed for the researcher to get a sense of the work-space and personality of

participants. There is a lot to be learned from office decorations, space layout, and physical location of participants' offices. This also facilitated meaningful observations, which allowed for deeper exploration and understanding of the institutional context. In addition, having to navigate the campus in search of buildings and offices allowed me to feel what a new student may experience. However, this also required for greater time in between interviews compared to Midwest University. Time between interviews averaged 30 minutes instead of 15 minutes for the prior case, and some breaks were even an hour-long to allow for more structured reflection and writing memos.

Most of the interviews took place in person, with the exception of two. The two student participants for West Coat University had to reschedule their interviews since the time of my visit coincided with the end of the academic semester. It was decided that student interviews should be conducted via video call at a more convenient time so that students could instead study during the time it would take to travel to campus for the interview. Overall, interviews lasted an average of 40 minutes (two minutes longer than Midwest University and 1 minute longer than the overall average) with the shortest interview lasting 25 minutes and the longest interview being 55 minutes. In total, there were 11 interviews, of which only four were group interviews and 7 were one-on-one interviews. An important distinction for group interviews at West Coast University is that sizes varied. Two of the group interviews had two participants and one group interview had three participants. These three group interviews were organized following the same logic which guided the formation of group interviews at Midwest University. The fourth, and final, group interview had six participants and was conducted as a focus group.

The importance to include a focus group in the study cemented itself after wondering what additional insights, renegotiations of stances, and deeper contextual understandings on the

case could have been uncovered from the main actors if a focus group had been conducted during the case visit for Midwest University. The rationale being that focus groups allow participants to test their memory and experiences in real time, and together paint a picture of how the case approaches equity-minded assessment. Typically, focus groups bring together six to ten people to discuss a specific topic—i.e. equity-minded assessment—with the goal of allowing participants to share their perspectives, hear the experiences and opinions of others, and perhaps refine their views based on the information that others provide (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Hennink, 2014). So, a benefit of focus groups is that new data is constructed due to the group interaction. Typically, focus groups consist of people who have not previously met to allow for participants to negotiate with new sources of information and/or topics they may not encounter in their daily lives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Given the characteristics of the case and the purpose of the study, having a focus group with strangers would not benefit the understanding of the phenomenon at hand. Since the majority of the case participants have worked in close proximity to one another, it seemed interesting to see how their camaraderie projects, how group dynamics play, whose voices dominate, and what memories and challenges their peers elicit from one another. The six person focus group interview took place after most of the focus group members had already been interviewed individually. This helped ensure that their answers during individual interviews would not be influenced by what others shared during the focus group. The two participants in the focus group who had yet to be interviewed had very specific roles within the case, and the most pertinent questions to understand their experiences were not explored by the questions posed at the focus group. The focus group allowed for a deeper understanding of 1) the dynamics between the main case actors and their relationships within the case, 2) supporting details about the context, and 3) supplemental insights into how the initiative began

implementing equity-minded assessment. Since most of the insights gained was supplemental compared to the data gathered from individual and smaller group interviews, it was deemed best to not go back to conduct a focus group at Midwest University.

Data Analysis

Following the advice from both Yin (2018) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), data analysis happened simultaneously with data collection. This means that themes were being identified as interviews were occurring, and the findings from a group of interviews informed the focus and direction of the next group of interviews. This is the reason time was built in-between interviews which allowed reflection and writing memos. It facilitated the data analysis process in real-time so that subsequent interviews and other data collection efforts would be aware of and investigate these emerging themes and topics of interest. A perfect example of this deals with the use of a focus group interview for the second case. After the conclusion of the first round of data collection with Midwest University, reviewing interviews and memos helped identify the potential use of an interview which grouped all of the main actors in the case to uncover their personal relationships, demeanors around each other, how other's experiences can help shape the meaning their peers form, etc. since this was not directly addressed in the other interviews collected to that point.

Another example comes from identifying simple procedural elements that help enhance the quality of data collected such as reviewing notes from an interview and playing back parts of the session. This allowed the researcher to improve upon the way the interviews are conducted by including less verbal affirmations such as 'yes' and 'sure' which seemed to interrupt the speaker at times, and instead insert more non-verbal ones which can still offer the affirmation without making participants feel the researcher wants to speak. In addition, reviewing the notes

from latter interviews and comparing them to notes from the first few interviews allowed for the identification of the emerging themes. So this simultaneous data collection and analysis process helps to streamline the execution of the study to better meet the intended purpose and better answer thee research questions. Waiting until the end to conduct data analysis in qualitative inquiry can often be bad practice since it can lead to missed opportunities to address gaps, refine approaches, and require more work on the back end through follow-up interviews which could have been addressed from the beginning; which is a similar sentiment to those shared by Yin (2018) and Merriam & Tisdell (2016).

After the first day of interviews for each case, the researcher listened to the interviews; albeit not from beginning to end. At times, the researcher fast forwarded to specific questions or to time-stamps the researcher made notes of when participants shared key insights. The purpose of reviewing the first day of interviews was to make note of what was addressed and what may still be missing from the case so that it could be expanded on and/or addressed during the second day of interviews. In addition, this form of data analysis conducted simultaneously to data collection helped identify when data saturation was happening on a specific research question. Saturation in qualitative research simply refers to the realization that "continued data collection produces no new information or insights into the phenomenon" or a specific aspect of the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.199). After the conclusion of data collection for each case, the same process followed for the second day of interviews, accompanied by a review of field notes, memos, documents, and pictures. Thoughts, reflections, and memories from the second day of data collection were written down—and the process then expanded for both days of data collection—to ensure they were not lost. Given that the case visits occurred in quick

succession (approximately two weeks within each other), interviews were not transcribed until all in-person interview data collection was complete.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. All participants were given pseudonyms in real-time as interviews were transcribed so that all self-identifying information was gone from the transcripts. This was done so that transcripts could be printed if need be for data analysis at any time without concern for participants' privacy leaking to third parties (more on how participants' rights and privacy were ensured is covered later in the Procedures section). Transcripts were typed onto Microsoft Word documents on a computer not connected to the internet. The researcher used the Infinity USB-2 Digital Foot Control audio editing pedal to facilitate the stopping and play-back of audio recordings during transcription. The computer audio software used to play-back recordings were Sony's Sound Organizer (version 1.6.02.12112), Express Scribe Transcription Software (free trial version), and Microsoft's Windows Media Player (version 12.0.18362.418). It took just under four minutes, on average, to transcribe one minute of recorded audio. One interview was attempted to be transcribed using Nuance's Dragon software (professional version 15) to see if this would be a feasible and quicker alternative. The researcher noticed it was taking a similar amount of time to correct the software's transcript—so it was not saving significant time—while also limiting the depth of insight the researcher gained by typing participants' words himself. Thus, all interviews were ultimately transcribed by hand, which added another important element to the data analysis process. Many emerging themes, comments, and connections to other sources of data were noted on the margins of the transcripts as interviews were transcribed, which ultimately helped the overall data analysis process.

Once transcripts were completed, they were uploaded into Nvivo (version 12 plus) to help manage and advance the coding, theme identification, and theme refinement processes. Coding is a process that helps identify themes within the data regardless of type or source. A code can be a single word or a full paragraph which helps quickly identify and retrieve data which capture the essence of a theme or evokes an element of a salient finding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These codes are then grouped into themes, with the caveat that codes should only belong to one theme. Thus, codes should be concise enough to stand alone in referencing a theme without any additional supporting context other than the focus of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a result, the coding process for qualitative research can often be process of identification, refinement, and redefining codes until a final list of themes is well supported by data. Using Nvivo, data were first analyzed through open coding, which is the process of annotating all bits of data which seem important for the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) into what Nvivo refers to as nodes (another word for codes). As expected, open coding resulted in an immense number of codes, which were then grouped into an initial list of 48 themes. The second phase of data analysis involved breaking these codes down into more self-sustaining and focused codes, and refining the themes they describe. This often involved grouping similar themes together into new themes, or absorbing themes with only two or three supporting codes into larger, related themes (see Appendix F). This process of refining and renegotiating codes and themes is called axial coding (Charmaz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and it arises from the continued interpretation and reflection on the meaning of the data collected (Richards, 2015). Axial coding continued until a more manageable number of themes emerged which are true to the data; also emphasizing that the themes are true to what the data say.

Throughout the coding process, the researcher kept a list of all of the themes that emerged, and made notes of how they were grouped and renegotiated into new themes. It is also important to note that the larger themes found in the data also have sub-categories which explain the main elements of each theme. These categories are the groups of codes which stand-alone but come together to explain different facets of the greater, overall theme (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Categories also need to "be *responsive to the purpose of the research"* [emphasis in original], exhaustive to the point that all important data of the study fall within these categories, and categories should address the study's research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.212). Following the advice of Merriam & Tisdell (2016), the researcher also kept a running list of thoughts and rationale used to group sub-themes into larger ones, as well as the categories that inform each theme; which helps keep a track record of the overall classification system used by the study (2016) and help the researcher jump back into the data analysis if the process is paused for some time. Nvivo was a useful tool to organize and code the data, and then to build themes and analyze them among different variables. In Nvivo, participant interviews were divided amongst their respective two cases, with participant characteristics —i.e. race/ethnicity, gender, role, and department—added as case classification attributes for each person. This allowed for the exploration of themes by both a case by case basis, an overall basis, and by characteristics of individual participants.

Coding began on a case by case basis. First, transcripts for Midwest University were coded in the order the interviews occurred. The accompanying electronic documents were uploaded to Nvivo and coded in similar fashion. All physical documents which could not easily be recreated in a Microsoft Word document by the researcher were scanned (redacting identifiable information by placing white paper over sensitive information) and uploaded to

Nvivo, as well. Those which the researcher could recreate were made and uploaded to Nvivo.

Pictures taken were uploaded into Nvivo with special attention to remove any potentially

identifiable information. Finally, every researcher field note and memos were typed into

Microsoft Word documents and uploaded to Nvivo. The data in these documents and images

were coded following the same processes as with the transcripts, by pulling specific sets of data

or the entire document/image into specific themes. This helped to ensure that each source of data

was being analyzed and coded appropriately to reinforce, challenge, or create themes. This

process was then repeated for the interviews, documents, pictures, and field notes for West Coast

University, with the end goal of all relevant materials from both cases feeding into the themes

and findings of the study.

Similarly, the findings will be presented along these lines. The finding for Midwest

University will be presented first, along with a case narrative expanding upon the context of the

case. Then, the same structure will follow for West Coast University. Finally, cross-case findings

will be presented, with additional findings set forth across participant characteristics such as role

within the case (faculty, staff, administrator, or student), department within the institution

(student affairs or academic affairs), gender (male or female), and race/ethnicity (white, Latinx,

African American, and Southeast Asian). The purpose of analyzing and presenting findings in

this manner is to provide substantial analysis for each case as a stand-alone entity, while also

allowing for conversation across cases and recognizing that individuals may have share

experiences and understanding which can be shared across different aspects of their identity.

Once themes were narrowed down to a more manageable number—Creswell (2013)

suggest having no more than 6 themes or main findings—this study utilized respondent

validation to ensure the findings are accurate to the lived realities and shared experiences of the

case participants. Respondent validation is the process of sharing emerging themes and tentative interpretations with some of the case participants to check the plausibility and appropriateness of findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This helps to provide another check and balance to the study to ensure the researcher is not leading the study astray by misinterpreting the meaning and commonalities between the insights participants shared. Maxwell (2013) also identifies respondent validation and the feedback gathered from it as a useful way to ensure the researcher is properly controlling his biases. This study directly shared its case-specific findings with one participant who served as a main point of contact for that case. The respondents were given two weeks to return feedback, and were encouraged to also share the findings with all of the case participants who were interviewed so they, too, may offer feedback. In total, feedback from 4 case respondents was attained across both cases. Respondent validation was done once during the study when themes were narrowed down below 4 for each case and below 8 across both cases. Engaging in respondent validation at multiple points of data analysis is regarded as good practice to ensure findings are true to the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Respondent validation also helped to refine and further narrow down themes to the final two themes distinctive to each case and the four themes spanning across both cases.

Finally, it is important to note how approaching this study with a critical perspective impacts the data analysis process. For one, this lens ensures that issues affecting equity in assessment are central to the themes developed. Questions of equity and how specific themes address this concept will continuously be asked as themes are uncovered. However, this also requires that this critical perspective be appropriate for both the context of each case and the study as a whole. It cannot be forced onto the data, but instead be a lens that helps question the data and make interpretations in ways which advance understanding of how equitable assessment

can help to remedy issues of (in)equity and (in)justice. Operating from a stance that questions how power and oppression, differential opportunity, racism, and the intersection of these leads to a more nuanced data analysis process. It is why themes will also be explored based on participant characteristics and the possible intersection of those characteristics. For example, it is important to determine if insights from white participants advance a specific theme more strongly than Latinx participants or vice versa, and why that may be. Similarly, it would be useful to at least explore whether Latinas' insights disproportionately support a specific theme compared to insights shared by Latinos; or even to those shared by white or African American female participants.

Ensuring Participants' Protection & Rights

This study took active measures to ensure the protection of participants. First, the study received approval from the Institutional Research Board (IRB) in 2018 prior to beginning data collection to ensure the intended procedures, scope of the study, and data collected were appropriate (IRB protocol number 19351). IRB materials and consent forms were electronically shared with participants prior to data collection to provide them ample opportunity to review the study and their rights (the consent form can be found in Appendix D). In addition, at the time of each interview the researcher reviewed materials—including participants' rights and contact information for both the principal investigator, the researcher, and the IRB office—with each participant before interviews began. Informed consent was attained along with permission to audio record, and study participants also received a signed copy of the informed consent form.

While no truly sensitive information was shared that could cause harm to participants, their privacy was still protected through various procedures. First, original audio recordings were kept on devices without internet access (i.e., a memory card and external hard drive). Interviews

were transcribed by the researcher, so no entity external to this study has listened to any potentially identifying information contained within the interview recordings. In addition, transcripts were de-identified in real time to ensure anonymity, so aliases were inserted at the same time the transcripts were created. As such, transcripts do not contain participants' real names, institutional affiliations, titles, etc. Instead, two separate documents were created, one with random ID numbers and participants' aliases, and another document with the participants' real names and their corresponding ID numbers. This way, both documents would be needed to identify participants. These two documents are kept in separate hard drives which are not connected to the internet. Similarly, any identifiable information was also aliased and given ID numbers in this fashion (e.g., the name of a specific initiative and potentially identifiable project). Field notes were also typed and any identifiable information was changed to the proper alias or fully redacted. Original field notes and physical documents were kept in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home. Electronic documents and other data provided by participants is stored in hard drives without internet access or located within password-protected folders. While these measures may be extreme for the nature of the study, the researcher does not take lightly the need to maintain participants' anonymity and importance to uphold their rights. It is the least the researcher can do to show appreciation and respect for participants' willingness to share their experiences and candid perspectives to advance the goals of this study.

Role of the Researcher and Statement of Research Beliefs

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the primary tool of data collection and interpretation. As such, a grand challenge associated with this relationship is ensuring that the study actually focuses on presenting the facts as they occurred through the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants as organized through the lens of the researcher. The researcher

should not morph participants' experiences to fit any specific box, or reinforce any assumptions, preferences, or experiences the researcher holds. As such, it is helpful to be aware of the assumptions and potential biases the researcher brings with them into the study. In this instance, the researcher approached this study with various pre-positions on the phenomenon at hand. For instance, the researcher operates from a critical stance as it relates to assessment of student learning. The researcher believes there are inherent structures of power and oppression, and even marginalization and idolization within the assessment plans and practices the field follows. This causes the researcher to have a keen focus on whose voices are being heard as part of assessment procedures. This includes ensuring the student voice is ever present in assessment practice. This is why students were involved in the study. The researcher is knowledgeable in assessment, and advocates strongly for equity-minded assessment practices which are student-focused and done for internal improvement. With this in mind, the researcher's role is not to push these perspectives on participants, but instead interpret participants' experiences through these lenses; leveraging the researcher's own experience and knowledge to build coherence among the rich data gathered throughout the study.

The researcher is a facilitator; the element of the study that helps to build understanding through listening, validating, and organizing. In order to help keep these biases and experiences in control, the researcher will practiced reflexivity throughout data collection and analysis. Reflexivity is the process through which the researcher reflects on how he/she/ze "affects and is affected by the research process" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 249; Probst & Berenson, 2014). During data collection, reflexivity happened during the breaks in between interviews, and during memo writing at the conclusion of each day's data collection. An element of this involved the researcher listening to a couple of interviews from the first day of interviewing at each case

paying special attention to how the researcher framed questions, the types of comments the researcher made during the interview, the specific topic(s) which elicited responses from the researcher, and other similar cues which may hint that the researcher's biases and predispositions were guiding the conversation instead of the participants' own experiences. These insights were then used by the researcher to be mindful of his biases throughout the study, and to correct, if necessary, in real-time. This also helped to reflect on how the researcher's own thinking about equity-minded assessment and understanding of the case grew as the study advanced. During data analysis, reflexivity happened when there was a significant combination or reworking of themes and categories. The same type of memo writing and reflective journaling took place to ensure the logic for these changes was sound and true to what the data say. In addition, this serves as logical points to check-in and mentally evaluate how the data analysis process has altered the researcher's view of the phenomenon, what is important for equity-minded assessment, and what it may mean for future discussions.

The researcher is properly equipped to conduct this study due to professional and academic training on qualitative research methods—specifically interviewing and utilizing multiple sources of data—and through the supervision offered by study's director of research and the rest of the doctoral dissertation committee. For one, the researcher has refined his interview skills by leading various qualitative inquiry projects which used semi-structured interviews as the main data collection method. Over time, these endeavors have allowed the researcher to operate as a receptive, welcoming, and engaging interviewer while maintaining focus on the topic at hand. In addition, these experiences have allowed the researcher to properly code interviews, identify themes, and present findings which stay true to the data. In qualitative research, this is often a challenge which can be derailed if the researcher does not appropriately control for their

biases and predispositions. The researcher knows the importance of ensuring his experiences only operate as a lens through which data is interpreted and organized; they should never become the central element of the study. Supplementing these interview experiences, the researcher also has useful practice regarding the use of multiple sources of evidence to create meaning. Through working at the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), the researcher has generated significant experience gathering data from documents and observations. The researcher has helped conduct case studies for NILOA, as well, seeking to uncover examples of good assessment practice. Finally, the researcher is a leading voice in the conversation of equity-minded assessment practice in the postsecondary sector, which numerous presentations on the topic at well-regarded academic conferences, and authored white papers, book chapters, and journal articles.

Even with these qualifications, the fact remains that one of the criticisms of qualitative research studies is that the researcher can bring with him/her/zer too much subjectivity to the table. This study argues that such subjectivity can actually be a source of strength when properly bounded. The researcher comes to a study equipped with his/her/zer own diverse experiences which makes them unique filters through which to interpret, make meaning, and present ideas. After all, if the researcher is the main tool used in the study, then the strength of this tool is the researcher's sharpness: how well he/she/ze cuts through the numerous data collected to refine and sort it within the focus of the study. Given the various participants in this study, it is the researcher's role to bring these diverse perspectives together under various themes, make meaning between their lived experiences, and interpret the data through a lens which advances the bounding purpose of the overall study. It is the researcher who identifies a need or a problem and then works to ensure the data is focused, appropriate, and robust enough to fulfill its purpose

while staying true to participants' stories. The researcher need not own the study. The study is, in essence, a story told by the participants. After all, it is through participants' experiences that the study unfolds. Participants provide the study's substance. The researcher is merely providing structure and organization so the different voices are not speaking across each other, but are instead given the appropriate opportunity to be heard and understood. Those common stories are emboldened and bundled together as themes. Those less common or dissenting views are also given the opportunity to present themselves. The researcher is not a gatekeeper for prominence, but is the filter which ensures data is properly sorted into findings that align with the purpose of the study.

Qualitative studies are undertaken to advance understanding of a specific phenomenon or to meet a need. However, when the main data gathered is through the perspective of numerous people with diverse backgrounds, contexts, agendas, etc., the researcher needs to keep things focused on the study itself, and make meaning of all these data in the context of the study. The researcher's perspective matters and is an asset because it allows him/her/zer the prowess to form interpretations that may be missing from the field; to raise questions that others have not; to interpret data in ways that others may not have thought about before. However, the line is drawn when the researcher's lived experiences begin to distort the words, experiences, and lived realities of the participants. The data must never be altered intentionally to mislead, misinterpreted, or used in ways that distort the participants' truths. On the other hand, if both researcher and participants believe the world is round, then the actual perspective, words, and experiences of the participants must still be reported. Just because beliefs align does not mean it offers the researcher free reign over the data to make claims beyond what was actually observed

in the study. Fidelity between procedures, findings, and conclusions must be maintained, and this responsibility lies on the shoulders of the researcher.

Conclusion

The methods and procedures followed by this study aimed to ensure its validity and the reliability of its findings to overcome the limitations of qualitative inquiry; all-the-while ensuring the study's internal validity through coherence between the study's design, findings, and conclusions. Much has been made about the lack of generalization and 'rigor' stemming from qualitative research because it does not use random samples or conduct data collection in controlled settings (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2009; Carminati, 2018). However, these are not the purposes of this study. This study does not set out to make inferences regarding causation, or chart a singular path toward understanding equity-minded assessment applicable to the entire landscape of assessment in postsecondary education. Instead, this study seeks to understand what equity looks like in assessment, how equity-minded assessment came to be, and why it became sustainable at these two distinct cases. The hope is for other institutions, programs, and individuals to find a similar understanding, and from it identify elements which can be applied to their own context to advance equity-minded assessment.

Even with the various systems of checks and balances in place to ensure this study's internal validity and alignment, it is important to note that there can still be pitfalls limiting the study's impact. For one, even though this study uses multiple sources of data and different methods of data collection, Fielding and Fielding (1986) argue that there are still limitations to each fountain of knowledge which can build atop themselves and cause issues. The best way to address validity is to be conscious of the limitations and not overextend the implications of each source of data beyond what can reasonably be ascertained. Thus, focusing on the validity and

rigor of a study based on methods can be a losing proposition. Instead, the conversation on rigor should focus on ensuring the study makes sound conclusions from what the data themselves say; and ensuring that there is coherence between the purpose of the study, the methods, the findings, and the conclusions.

This study has paid careful attention to use the appropriate methods and procedures needed to answer the research questions and meet the study's intended purpose. There has been an active effort to treat each source of data within its limits to advance themes and findings, and to ensure these findings are soundly rooted in the data. The researcher provides vision and organization, but even these should be nested within the shared knowledge of the various sources of evidence in the study to give it coherence; and to focus it around the study's intended purpose of holistically understanding the phenomenon of equity-minded assessment.

Chapter IV:

Providing Context: A Case-by-Case Exploration of Findings

This chapter provides a case-by-case analysis of the findings, beginning with West Coast University (WSU) and then exploring Midwest University (MU). Each case is a program that is nestled within an institution, so it is crucial to not just describe the case but to also give a broader understanding of the institutional characteristics within which each case exists. This chapter sets forth the larger institutional context of each case, and then presents the program-level case context where equity-minded assessment is occurring. Understanding these contexts helps to better understand and situate data. Next, the themes that are distinctive to each case are introduced. Each theme is accompanied by a brief discussion including challenges, opportunities, and next steps. (An analysis and discussion of common themes across cases is offered in Chapter 5.) It is important to note that there are various similarities between the case contexts, and this is done on purpose as explained in chapter 3. One important similarity to note is that both cases focus heavily on freshman and sophomore commuter students—students who for these institutions are predominantly Latinx local-area students who live with their families and work off campus at least part-time. Given this emergent topic, this chapter begins with a brief review of literature on commuter students to better understand this population.

While the study seeks to understand broader implications from the work occurring in these institutions, it is prudent to analyze data and present data within their individual context. While there are similarities, these cases are not identical; and there is benefit in highlighting the differences. The drivers, practices, and policies in place which support equity-minded assessment in each case are very different, and understanding these nuances provides crucial insight regarding how they came to be, how they are sustained, their challenges, and opportunities.

Understanding the context of each case provides the foundation through which to begin to make sense of these data. Identifying the differences between cases also shines a brighter spotlight onto common themes and how others can learn from them.

Commuter Students

Since commuter students became an emergent element of the study, it is appropriate to revisit the literature and get a better understanding of this student population. Jacoby (1989) broadly defines commuter students as those who are not living in campus-owned housing. This includes residence halls, fraternity/sorority housing, or other institution associated housing such as campus veteran centers with dormitory space. The overwhelming majority of definitions revolve around this broad conceptualization of either living off campus (Alfano & Eduljee, 2013; Hintz, 2011; Skahill, 2003; Ortman, 1995) or living in non-institution-owned housing (Krause, 2007; Jacoby & Garland, 2004). While these definitions allow for the differentiation of commuter students compared to residential students, it does not offer deeper insight into a population of students who is very diverse and carries with it varied aspirations, needs, and goals (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2009).

Commuter students were first acknowledged as a distinct population in education research by Chickering's (1974) and Astin's (1975) seminal studies; both of which painted a bleak picture of commuter students when it came to persistence and retention. Chickering bluntly stated "the residents are the haves and the commuters, the have nots" since commuter students miss out on various benefits and opportunities that residential students receive by living on campus (1974, p. 49). Astin (1975) furthered the negative narrative of commuter students by finding that even students who began their college careers living on campus and then proceeded to move back home had significant increase in their drop-out rates. In a follow-up study, Astin

(1977) further extends this labeling of commuter students as 'the have nots' by finding that students who lived on campus were 12% more likely to graduate compared to commuter students, and residential students were also more likely to continue on to graduate school. In 1993, Pascarella et al., added a different perspective to the discussion by finding no statistically significant difference between residential and commuter students' math and reading comprehension, but did find a significant disparity between their critical thinking scores. As a result, Pascarella et al., (1993) introduced the idea that it may be co-curricular experiences and how commuter students engage in "social and intellectual interaction with peers and faculty" outside of the classroom which may be contributing to the disparity in persistence and retention (p. 219).

In present time, research on commuter students says there is much more to consider when discussing the challenges affecting commuter students' ability to engage with the curriculum and campus community. Comparisons in achievement still are done between residential and commuter students, but emphasis is placed on understanding why those disparities exist. Commuter students are not a homogeneous population, and they bring with them very different needs and desires compared to their peers who live on campus (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2009). For example, commuter students tend to work longer hours than residential students— often at locations off campus that require additional commuting (Alfano & Edulijee, 2013; Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Commuter students also tend to be older (Evelyn, 2002) and have to negotiate multiple familial responsibilities (Jacoby, 2015) compared to their residential counterparts. Commuter students tend to be more stressed about concerns such as parking on campus and time management (Newbold, 2015). For commuter students, being a student is merely one identity among many (Keeling, 1999) which can cause commuter students to have to

continuously make difficult decisions such as "taking an exam or caring for a sick relative or between responding to a critical deadline at work and attending class" (Wilmes & Quade, 1986, p. 27).

Schlossberg (1989) identified that commuter students may find it more difficult to navigate the campus community, especially if they are first-generation or returning to college after a long time away. These students can feel isolated and marginalized causing them to be less likely to engage in enriching academic and co-curricular experiences (Schlossberg, 1989; Witten, James, & Roberts, 2020). Commuter students can often have low efficacy: low confidence in their academic ability as it relates to faculty expectations (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989), and diminished beliefs in their ability to lead (Dugan et al., 2008). As noted in Chapter 2 (page 46), student's sense of self-efficacy are important elements of student's agency in their education; an element that equity-minded assessment can help improve (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020).

These challenges have often led to commuter students struggling with belonging and finding their place within an institution (Strayhorn, 2012). So much so, that most of the studies around commuter students deal with ways to increase their sense of belonging—how a student views their place within the larger college community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) including their perceived level of social support (Strayhorn, 2012). Kuh et al., 2008 found that a lowered sense of belonging can negatively impact student engagement with activities that promote success. Further, any positive effects on student success derived from precollege factors—such as ACT/SAT scores—were also lessened when students commuted to campus, worked off-campus, or enrolled part-time (Kuh et al., 2008). In 2005, Pike and Kuh found that living off campus negatively affected engagement for non-college age students—which commuters are more likely

to be compared to their residential counterparts. So while the bleak picture continues to be painted by research, the silver lining is that even in light of these challenges commuter students are just as driven as their residential counterparts and put as much effort into coursework as their peers (Kuh, Gonyea, & Palmer, 2001). As Jacoby (2000) states, commuter students do want to be involved with the campus community and take an active role in their learning, but "their lives consist of balancing many competing commitments…They are not less committed to their education; they simply cannot always make education their primary focus" (p. 5).

Given these challenges affecting commuter students, the study agrees with Jacoby (2015): higher education cannot expect commuter students to realign their lives, priorities, needs, and identities to accommodate higher education. Instead, colleges and universities should adapt practices to make higher education more welcoming to commuters. Assessment must be one of those changing areas along with redesigning curricular and co-curricular opportunities that intentionally engage commuter students in meaningful ways.

Equity-minded assessment aligns well with recommended approaches for assessing commuter students. Biddix (2015) recommends:

1. interviewing commuter students as part of the assessment effort in order to gather deeper understanding of their actual learning experience and uncover ways to improve;

2. conducting needs assessment (i.e. taking stock of who your students are and what they need, expect, and their goals); and

3. using multiple sources of data in assessment which is part of good assessment practice for improvement.

Kodama (2015) also advances the notion that culturally responsive approaches can help diverse commuter students thrive and overcome their challenges. Assessment should be one of those

practices that utilize equity-mindedness to help bridge inequities affecting commuters. The need for such an equity-minded approach becomes even more crucial when considering the fact that commuters are not a homogeneous group; meaning there are differing needs for commuter students of color (Kodama, 2015)—e.g. Black (Yearwood & Jones, 2012) and Latinx (Saenz, Gonzalez, & Hurtado, 2011)—commuters with disabilities (Garland, 2015), age (Evelyn, 2002), and so on. The recommendations from Biddix can help contextualize assessment findings within students' real, lived experiences and help avoid the narrative of commuters not belonging, being less-than, and/or other negative stereotypes that can appear when making comparisons between commuter students of color and other populations (Harper, Smith, & Davis, 2016). Harper et al., (2016) also find that instances of racism, an unwelcoming campus climate, and lack of representation within the faculty, staff and administration all contribute to diminished engagement and sense of belonging among commuter students. This means that it is not only the practices themselves that must be considered, but also the context within which those practices happen: the norms, motivators, supports, policies, etc. that encompass assessment.

West Coast University: The Larger Institutional Context

West Coast University (WCU) is a selective, urban, and large public four-year doctoral degree-granting institution founded during the last decade of the 1800's. Their undergraduate enrollment is approximately 31,000 students, 55% of which are women and 66% of students identify as students of color (see Table 1 for a further breakdown of student enrollment by race/ethnicity). With this diverse enrollment comes the responsibility of ensuring these students graduate at similar rates regardless of background. To get there, WCU's strategic plan through 2025 carries an explicit focus on closing equity gaps and better serving diverse learners and students of color. WCU's six-year graduation rate is 73%, which holds well amongst different

student populations (see Table 2). It is worthy to highlight that WCU enrolls a large portion of students who are Pell-eligible (approximately 34% of undergraduates), and their six-year graduation rate is 69%; slightly lower than the overall graduation rate according to 2020 data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) database. One racial/ethnic population that is experiencing a gap, or differential returns, is the Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander population who has a 64% six-year graduation rate according to 2020 IPEDS data. Additionally, Table 1 shows that WCU is doing a better job supporting female students through graduation (77% six-year graduation rate) than male students (70%). While the institution is generally doing a good job of ensuring most students graduate, gaps such as these underscore the fact that there is always room for improvement. The good news is that leadership at WCU seems to be actively working towards this.

Table 2
WCU's 2019 Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	% of Undergraduate Enrollment
Asian	8%
Black/African American	4%
Filipino	6%
International	7%
Latinx/Hispanic	30%
Multiple Ethnicities	7%
Native American	0.4%
White	35%
Other/Not Declared	4%

Note. The total exceeds 100% due to rounding up/down of the numbers to safeguard the institution's identity. These data are adapted from 2020 data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) database.

Table 3
WCU's Six-Year Graduation Rate for the 2010 Cohort

Student Population	Six-Year Graduation Rate
Asian	73%
Black/African American	70%
Latinx/Hispanic	71%
Native American or Alaskan Native	100%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	64%
White	78%
Gender	
Female	77%
Male	70%
Pell Eligible	69%

Note. These data are adapted from 2020 data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) database

For over 120 years, there has been a maintained focus at WCU on improving its local community, pursuing research, and implementing environments commonly found in teaching universities (e.g. focusing on student needs and the classroom environment to nurture authentic learning opportunities that help students develop and reach their potential). These three elements of their mission amalgamate to create a comprehensive set of policies and practices guiding institutional action. However, in 2012 another 'mission', of sorts, was added to WCU when it became a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). An aspect of focus in their 2020-2025 strategic plan is to make the HSI designation a more embedded element of their campus goals and identity to inform how to better serve Latinx students. WCU now also qualifies as an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI).

Hispanic-Serving Institutions are among the most diverse colleges and universities in the country, often enrolling significant numbers of other student populations along with Latinx

students (Excelencia in Education, 2016b). To qualify as an HSI, colleges and universities must enroll the full-time-equivalent of at least 25% undergraduate students who identify as Latinx, and 50% of undergraduate FTE students must be Pell Grant eligible (Higher Education Act, 1965). In line with its HSI designation, WCU has been repeatedly recognized as one of the best institutions in the United States for Latinx learners by *Hispanic Outlook on Education Magazine* (2019). Exemplifying the diversity of HSIs, it is often the case that HSIs also qualify as other types of minority serving institutions; often overlapping with Predominantly Black Institutions and AANAPISIs (Rutgers Center for MSIs, 2019). It is, then, no surprise that WCU is also an AANAPISI. Similarly to the HSI designation, AANAPISI status is determined by enrollment percentages. To be an AANAPISI, an institution must have an FTE enrollment comprised of at least 10% Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander student. Similarly to HSIs, AANAPISIs must have 50% of their undergraduate student population be Pell-eligible, or qualify for Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG), Federal Work Study (FWS), or the Federal Perkins Loan (Higher Education Act, 1965).

Since these additional foci of supporting Latinx, Asian, and Native American Pacific Islander students were not part of the founding mission of WCU but, instead, were added by opportune enrollments, it becomes that much more important that the institution is intentional in embedding these foci into their overall policies and practices. Otherwise, the very students they are tasked with serving can fall through the cracks, and inequities can take be exacerbated. The institution has an HSI task force appointed by WCU's president, and a similar task force to support the AANAPISI focus has been created with the goal of applying for funding to create programs that benefit these students. Fortunately, as the next few pages discuss, there is a prominent inclusive and intentional stance in how WCU uses, supports, and expands assessment

to identify and address inequities. The unique ways in which equity-mindedness in assessment is supported at WCU showcases how such an intentional approach can serve to fulfill these multiple foci.

The Pursuit of Equity at WCU

Leaders at WSU are embracing the diversity that accompanies its HSI and AANAPISI statuses. To ensure this is the case across the university, equity at WCU is driven forward by administrators and policy. Leaders openly speak about equity and equity related issues on campus and society, and openly positions it as a university responsibility to help overcome those issues. Perhaps none is more central to this message and the centricity of equity-mindedness at WCU than its president. WCU's staff, faculty, and students are invited to *charlas*—or chats— with the president every semester. While the open invitation to presidential chats is not new, the fact that these events are billed as *charlas*—intentionally using the Spanish term in presidential events—invokes the sentiment of the importance of diversity, it gives credence to other fountains of knowledge, and recognizes that there is a population of students enrolled in the university who identify as Latinx; and they matter. A new project was also launched empowering faculty to partner with community members to explore ways that WCU's resources and expertise can help resolve social and educational disparities that propagate various inequities. Five projects will be pursued in Spring 2021. In addition, WCU serves as a co-sponsor in a bi-national academic conference with a university in Mexico to explore issues impacting their regions, find common solutions for real-world problems, and spark innovation. Finally, within the next five years as part of its strategic plan, WCU's leadership is hoping to attain federal grants to better support its Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander students.

With this said, WCU is not without challenges. The campus climate has not always been welcoming for everyone. The reality is that incidents and mistakes happen everywhere, but it is how WCU has responded to these challenges that matter. For example, there were recent campus climate issues affecting Black students. These incidents included threatening messages on social media, white nationalist symbols placed around campus, vandalism to the African American center, and instances of hate-speech.

"We've had some issues with some hate crimes this year. We've had some issues with, particularly around our African American students this year. There's really serious concerns, so the center for teaching and learning has built some summer bootcamps and workshops for our faculty this year in response to the requests from our—or I should say demands—from our African American students. Um, about what their needs are based on their experience here which has been pretty negative. Um, not just this year but in the past. But they've been able to feel—they've really voiced it this year, and we listened."

-Clara

Instead of simply redefining its diversity statement, or saying 'inclusivity matters at West Coast University', the administration, faculty, and staff laid out actual plans of action and followed through. They met with Black students and community members to understand the issues. Over 500 faculty, staff, and administrators listened to needs and pledged to take appropriate action. A ten step plan was developed to root out any systemic biases and issues creating hostile campus climate for Black students. Lifting the Black experience on campus was embedded into the strategic plan, including increasing Black representation amongst the faculty and administration. Leaders at WCU leaned against the university's commitment to equity to ensure the Black community on campus not only felt heard and valued, but then made sure to act

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upon it and get to work towards increasing equity on campus. It is within this widespread sense of duty towards increasing equity for any population being impacted by inequities, racism, oppression, and injustice within which the WCU case is situated.

The Focused WCU Case Context: Closing Gaps for Commuter Students through Assessment

This study seeks to understand a very specific case that exists within the larger institutional context. However, for the sake of simplicity, this study will refer to the case as West Coast University. Hence, this means that from this point forward, when the study speaks about WCU, the institution, etc., it is referring to the case itself and not the actual larger institutional context. For WCU, the case is a program aimed at remedying observed inequities experienced by the commuter student population. WCU's commuter student population is representative of the overall enrollment and comprises approximately 1,500 new freshmen each academic year. The institution enrolls approximately 5,200 new freshmen each year, meaning that at least 33% of freshmen commute to campus. If sophomores are included, that is almost 4,000 commuter students served by WCU. There is also a greater chance that commuter students may also be part-time undergraduate students—15% of all WCU undergraduate students enroll part-time— giving way for possible disconnect and disengagement amongst a large portion of the incoming and current students. If not addressed appropriately, this disconnect can grow and lead to lasting, disparate negative educational impacts for students.

In 2009, over half of WCU's commuter students did not return the next academic year. Various initiatives kicked off on campus to try to remedy this, but the trend continued. Commuter students were not attaining the same outcomes as students who lived in campus residences. Commuter students were more likely to be on academic probation, have lower sense

of belonging, and lower psychological well-being.

> "We ran a commuter assessment with what were students saying about their commuter
> experience, and one thing that stuck out to me is this line that somebody said. What was
> it? Oh, you know, '*the only thing I have for me at [West Coast University] is a parking
> spot, and half the time that's not there either'*. They couldn't find or make connections. It
> was a very difficult time to be a commuter on this campus. They couldn't find
> information. Really couldn't succeed."

> -Kevin

To address the inequities affecting commuter students, a new initiative focused around creating new pathways for commuter students to succeed was implemented at WCU. The central element of the case is a one-credit hour course that can be supplemented with additional experiences, such as general education discussion courses related to the student's major, learning communities, mentoring, and embedding efforts within two general education courses. The program focuses strongly on freshman students, and gives them the agency to choose their path through the program by enrolling in as few as one credit-hour, or as many as six. All incoming commuter students are placed on the pathway of their choosing during a freshman orientation-style reception specifically for commuter students.

The one-credit course, which is the central element to the case, is a university seminar style course that most incoming commuter freshmen are encouraged to take.

> "We have a one unit seminar. It is kind of like a first-year experience. One unit only in
> the Fall for 14 weeks. The seminar course—and this is actually a re-design. The course
> itself has been around for a while, but it was losing some focus. There was, ah, there was
> a little bit of an absence of [students gaining] academic skills, academic engagement,

connecting you to how, ah, how do you connect with your advisors in your major? How you connect with your students in your major? How you talk to professors? Because that can be intimidating. So, so there was opportunity to also have great conversations with folks on how to have these important discussions of navigating the campus outside the classroom while also increasing academic skills."

-George

The course is taught by graduate students following a curriculum developed by faculty at WCU's college of education. The seminar course is divided amongst various sections to accommodate small cohort sizes between 15 and 20 students each to allow for all students to participate, offer instructors the opportunity to learn students' needs, and promote deeper connections between students. The course is organized by topic areas, where each week the course discussion revolves around topics such as gender equity, leadership, study habits, campus resources, cultural wealth, LGBTQ+ pride, campus resources, community service, and so on.

The course uses various forms of assessment, primarily following a pre-test, post-test, and post post-test design. These tests designed to capture students' self-reported impacts of the intervention are supplemented by regular reflections, feedback to instructors and peers, and other course assignments.

"The focus has been, sort of, how can we look at not necessarily the sort of student work as traditionally envisioned, but look at the student self. The self-report, self-direct reports, perceptions, change in their own efficacy perceptions, sense of belonging. All of these things that we think will contribute to greater success both within the campus environment and beyond. Focusing our assessments on these, and going about it equitably. Asking what students need and using that to use appropriate, you know,

change our practices, our approaches, and, uh, yea. Because if these students aren't experiencing the campus the same, they aren't having similar opportunities, they are telling us that what we do for other students doesn't work, then we would be crazy not to listen and change appropriately. So our approach is different in what we look at, but we place value on these students and rely on those self-reports. We can talk about the problems with those and the caveats, but they're working."

-George

Indeed, their approach to the course and how it is assessed seems to be working. Some of the positive takeaways from this program have been that commuter students have higher grade point averages, stronger sense of confidence on their academic selves, higher satisfaction with their sense of belonging and connection to the campus, and lower chances of being placed on academic probation.

"Kevin had a directive to decrease the academic probation rate for commuter students by 20% through this program. And we were all scared for him [laughs], but it ended up decreasing by 40%!"

-Emma

These positives have been gleaned thanks in large part to an internal assessment process focused on improvement and driven by the innate motivation of those involved to achieve more equitable outcomes for commuter students. They intentionally chose to use assessment as a means to shine a bright light on inequities and implement strategies to remedy them.

WCU's Approach to Equity-Minded Assessment

How assessment is conceptualized at WCU is very much aligned to the processes, purposes, and approaches set forth by Kuh and colleagues (2015a). Assessment is driven by the

outcomes—the skills, knowledge, and goals—students should attain from the commuter program. Assessment at WCU is carried out with the understanding that it primarily serves a purpose for internal improvement—to discern what is working well and where opportunities exist to improve. Assessment relies on direct evidence of learning and utilizes diverse examples of student learning to supplement data and then close the loop—use evidence and assessment data to make informed decisions on how to improve teaching and learning. The sources of evidence of student learning must also be diverse. In other words, one source of assessment data is not enough to accurately capture what students know and can do. Finally, feedback loops are present throughout the case. All involved—students, instructors, staff, and admins—have various opportunities to provide, receive, and incorporate meaningful feedback in real-time so that assessment is not only summative but also offers the chance to implement changes in real-time.

Supplementing this culture of assessment focused on internal improvement is the case's apparent data-driven practice. Feedback information is used to supplement data from students' and instructors' respective pre- and post-questionnaires. Students' questionnaires focus on gathering their perceived improvements/declines along various outcomes, while instructors speak towards course, curriculum, and their own development/needs. Staff who also help commuter students—e.g. program advisors and mentors—also provide this valuable data. It all feeds into a shared document accessible by all within the institution in order to be able to have a rich data set from which to run analyses disaggregated alongside various student characteristics, the intersections of those characteristics, and other variables of interest such as GPA or specific outcomes. The latter of which are core pieces of equity-minded assessment (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017, 2020).

The term 'equity-driven' is used at West Coast University to describe their assessment decision making, how they approach assessment to make it inclusive of diverse perspectives (including faculty, staff, admins, and students alike), and work so that all of their assessment practices are focused on assuring commuter student success. Case participants are cautiously aware that some may interpret 'equitable' practices or 'equity-minded' approaches to mean 'less rigorous' practices (Humphreys & Gaston, 2019).

"For me, I push back around the idea that—or against the notion that what we're doing is hand-holding. I have a problem with that. And I don't think this is representative of this institution, necessarily, that people feel this way. But, I think it is representative of higher ed, when you talk of equity. Because what that means is that we—the broader 'we' as in higher education—are quick to pull resources away from someone that needs it because we think they're not doing enough. Or we have the expectation that students should meet us here [holds hand chest-high]; that we are only willing to go this far and the student should do the rest of the work to get here [moves hand higher]. And I think our equity-driven model believes in—it works towards—that we want to have a partnership with the student. Where the student is also doing some of the work and is learning, but we also want to scaffold our resources to meet their needs across different areas in real-time…Our form of equity means listening to students, making experiences relevant, informed by, you know, evidence and data, and working towards closing equity gaps for our commuter population, but not sacrificing the expectation of achievement."

-Emma

To combat this misconception, there is a focus on 'high-achievement' from its commuter students in the program, and the pathways offered revolve around ensuring students are placed in

the best position to attain the expected learning outcomes, develop the needed skills to succeed in WCU, and be empowered to have some control over their learning. To help acquire a better picture of what students know and can do—the outcomes students have acquired—multiple sources of evidence are used as recommended by Kuh and colleagues (2015a) for good assessment practice and Montenegro & Jankowski (2017; 2020) for equity-minded assessment.

> "our students have diverse ways of knowing, almost as diverse as they themselves are. So our assessments have to reflect that and be open to that diversity in thought and experience. And so, the various summative and formative, you know, data that we gather both inside and outside of the classroom, help us meet not just our assessment goals but also our equity goals."
>
> -Emma

Equity-minded assessment at WCU means leveraging students' lived experiences. Students' first-person life narratives, needs, and perspectives are central to the curriculum, learning, and assessment processes. The topics of discussion during the seminar course are tailored to fit the expressed needs of students. The pedagogy and resources leveraged as part of the learning process are altered if data say some students are being left behind along the way. Student reflections and feedback are as integral to the assessment plan and execution as are the instructors' lessons. As part of their weekly preparation, the graduate instructors provide feedback to administrators and curriculum designers regarding their students' progress, issues they observe, and ways to improve. Combined with students' weekly reflections, this offers real-time, formative assessment that is responsive to the needs of students.

Since assessment processes begin with the identification or creation of measurable and appropriate student learning outcomes, the student outcomes at WCU are aligned to key equity

performance indicators to ensure the assessment process is equity-minded from the beginning. These equity performance indicators are directly informed by the students themselves. Commuter students' need to develop certain cognitive, behavioral, and inter-personal skills which can impact achievement gaps in student success were used to create the equity indicators and determine the learning outcomes aligned to them.

The assessment approach at West Coast University is also equity-minded in a sense that all assessment data—whether quantitative or qualitative—are analyzed with an eye to catch and remedy possible inequities. All assessment data are disaggregated by multiple student identities and the intersection of those identities. For example, the outcomes of commuter students who are Latinx, Pell eligible, and enroll part-time can be analyzed and compared to the outcomes of Latinx, Pell eligible students who enroll full-time; or the outcomes of white students while keeping the other variables the same can be explored. The point is, disaggregation at WCU helps the institution identify gaps they may have missed for various student populations within their commuter population, and then develop strategies before the gaps become more serious or widespread. Martha and Karen, two administrators who do data analysis for the case, spoke about disaggregation during data analysis.

"…at this point [our data analyses] have all been exploratory mostly because it's a fairly recent program. Just two years. So we couldn't do random controls or anything like that. So, for example, the surveys that they've been giving students about sense of belonging, about sense of well-being, all that stuff, right? So, trying to see if there is any relationship between the support they are giving the students and growth on those and then any relationship between those measures and what the university has as their academic indicators for success, right? So GPA, persistence, things like that…we do some

ANOVA, correlation, things like that to become aware of his relationship and what's happening with these students. But I always tell people it's exploratory, and so we're doing a lot, and going beyond these indicators. We're just trying to understand it all."

-Martha

"…everybody has access and knowledge of the whole analysis, so if anyone has variable that we think maybe this makes a difference—like obviously there's first-gen, gender, race, and things like that—so there's like this drive of '*is there anything else we can plug and see if maybe it makes a difference?*' Um, because one of the goals is to try to help identify not only what services are helping, but for which students, right? And that's so so tricky. Because…students come with so many different backgrounds, right? So, that's what I'm really hopeful about, that by doing these something can come up that we catch but weren't maybe as aware of. Then maybe they will kind of, if there's a pre-test we can give students when they come in like do they have low sense of belonging or what's their psychological well-being, or something that they come in and we can say '*oh! You need help finding a community to belong to*' or '*you need help getting confidence as a learner*.' Whatever it is. I don't know. But we can get to a place where we have ways to help them get what they need as soon as possible. There's so many possibilities of what we can help inform and help create through data analysis and disaggregation so it's fun."

-Karen

Since a lot of the analysis is exploratory where they are searching to see what kinds of gaps and inequities are unearthed, one can imagine a scenario where endless time is spent analyzing data and not spending enough time coming up with strategies to address the identified inequities. There has to be a clear plan along with this exploratory approach to agree upon how

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deep the analysis will go, how action will be taken once gaps and inequities are observed, and who will be involved. A similar sentiment was shared by George when speaking about important considerations to make after the decision is made to disaggregate data:

> "So then the question becomes okay so, '*how granular do you want to go?*' The other question [is] '*to whom are we comparing?*' right? Are we comparing to highest achieving—one person said highest achieving—group. Well, who is that? So, I think it's really important to figure out, you know, what's the gap? Who are we comparing to? And those are things that sometimes we just go '*oh we just do this!*' and what we're being handed down now is much more of a sort of more, I think, a more inclusive discussion about—and more coordinated—about how can we serve our students better; our student populations better. So it's, it's, you know, I am hopeful and heartened by a lot of conversation I didn't use to hear. And they've been great…"

An important decision that needs to be made when disaggregating is what population is being used as the barometer? Too often the default population becomes 'white' when analyzing by race/ethnicity (Levy & Heiser, 2018), or it becomes non-Pell eligible, or non-first-generation. These comparisons can work to make students of color and those from already marginalized populations feel even more at the fringes; to be 'othered' and be 'less than' while white and affluent students are treated as that which students should aspire to be/reach. So there has to be careful consideration regarding disaggregation and how it is done. Montenegro & Jankowski (2020) talk about the need for *meaningful* disaggregation by properly planning the types of analyses, the comparison groups, and actions which will be taken based on the analyses. Practitioners at WCU appear to be deeply engaged in meaningful disaggregation and data analyses due to the questions they explore, continuously searching for inequities, the deep

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comparisons they make amongst student characteristics and outcomes, using data to close equity gaps, and even expanding how they use data disaggregation to help other student populations.

As part of their equity-minded approach, assessment data are not just leveraged at WCU to explore and address inequities for commuter students. They share the data from the commuter initiative to other programs and departments in the institution, and have even begun transferring improvements informed by commuter student data to improve how other departments teach and support diverse students. For example, Kevin speaks about how this case has now created evidence-based interventions and supports for non-commuter students:

"…all commuters who are going through the experience are now getting better supports because of the program—because of the data from reflections, pre-test, post-test, and the post post-test. And, so, you know, we're also now branching that, that, that assessment process off to our residential experience so we can start comparing what's needed in there as well. And actually I think you can start seeing changes in the residential communities because we can't, we can create one-size-fits-all learning communities, for example. We created a pseudo learning community for commuter students, but it can't be the same for non-commuters. Really what's needed [for them] will probably be different and so we will be working with them on creating a difference informed by data. But then there's the strategies that take place. So we borrowed from the seminar model and created a one-day kind of re-orientation—a student life orientation focused on residential students and serves as the introduction to the learning community. And that's where we build their small group cohorts. They meet their mentor. They meet their [institutional] seminar instructors. We address what are the myths that they've heard about the [institution]. Some I'd never heard of and other's I'd like to unhear, but we have to address them."

The success of this case has helped impact other students, as well. Which showcases an important element of equity-minded assessment that Montenegro & Jankowski (2020) describe: equity-minded assessment is not conducted to only remedy inequities alone. Equity-minded assessment brings an emphasis on using assessment to address inequities, but it also is about general improvement and informing teaching and learning for the benefit of all students. This is exemplified at WCU through the focus on commuter students, analyzing data by different student characteristics through meaningful disaggregation, enacting policy and practical changes to close equity gaps, and also finding additional evidence-based means to improve teaching and learning at the institution.

All assessment data are valuable at WCU. One element of equity-minded assessment which Montenegro & Jankowski (2020) champion for is the need to include small sample sizes in the data analysis process instead of excluding them from analyses altogether. Instead of analyzing or treating data as numbers—large n vs small n—data at WCU are viewed as important representations of the experiences of real human beings; the experiences, needs, and learning outcomes of their students. It is also important to note that when analyzing data for inequities, it is not always about searching for those statistical significant results.

> "We need to think about questions where the non-significant results are actually meaningful. So we know that residential students are outperforming the commuter students, so when you can correct for things and do some covariates and then find '*Hey! If we control this, there's no difference!*' That's actually good! That means that we're finding something that when given to those commuters we bring them up to the same level. It still that overall they're lower, so we still have work to do, but remembering that

a nonsignificant result can sometimes be a good thing is important when analyzing equity

questions."

<div align="right">-Martha</div>

When doing analysis it can too often be a hunt for statistical significance since those

results are the ones that get the most attention in publications and reporting. But assessment is

not always about those significant results, especially when trying to analyze positive impacts that

close achievement gaps when other variables that create those gaps are held in control. Small

sample sizes and statistically insignificant data can tell a compelling story.

Underscoring WCU's approach is Emma's belief that:

 "our multiple approaches to data collection, data analysis, and decision-making can

identify inequities across various outcomes within courses, experiences, and programs;

and address them in meaningful ways".

This speaks to the intentionality from which assessment is approached at WCU—from the

development of outcomes, to the collection of data, to data analysis, and ultimately through

closing the loop—being mindful of how these approaches can help identify and address

inequities. This is the definition of what it means to be equity-minded in assessment.

Bringing it Together: Driving and Supporting Equity-Minded Assessment at WCU

This section sets forth the distinct themes for West Coast University. While some

elements of these themes may overlap with observations and data gathered from Midwest

University, the uniqueness lies in how these themes manifest within WCU and serve to support

equity-minded assessment within this case. The themes are constructed from data offered by case

participants, and are unpacked by a brief discussion supported by literature, direct quotes, and

researcher observations. The themes are: (1) Assessing Without Fear: Finding Opportunity from

Weaknesses and Turning them Into Strengths and (2) Getting Our Affairs in Order: Student Affairs Leads Equity-Minded Assessment. It is important to note that these two themes help address two research questions: specifically what motivates equity-minded assessment and what supports it. These themes also offer supportive evidence to how some of the concepts set forth by Montenegro and Jankowski's (2017, 2020) framework for equity-minded assessment can be espoused.

Assessing Without Fear: Finding Opportunity from Weaknesses and Turning them Into Strengths

Faculty, staff, and administrators at West Coast University face similar dilemmas as their peers across higher education: they wear multiple hats, are resource constrained, and are averse to getting involved in activities which may open them up to criticism. Add to this the fact that many faculty, staff, and administrators have initiative fatigue. When it comes to assessment—an activity that is often seen as an add-on to already occurring work—these issues deeply impact the depth to which faculty, staff, and administrators are involved, the practices they instill, and the motivation they have to go beyond minimal requirements. As Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) note, equity-minded assessment is a practice that cannot be done half way. As such, it is imperative that programs and institutions find ways to appease some of the fears and concerns that can limit personnel involvement in using assessment to identify and address inequities.

Often times, the fears faculty and staff have when it comes to assessment is not related to a project or an initiative failing. Instead, the fear lies in the vulnerability that assessment itself demands when done well: transparency. Since good assessment practice calls for increased transparency (Kuh et al, 2015a; Jankowski & Provezis, 2011)—sharing of assessment data internally with peers and externally with stakeholders—there can be anxiety about what the data

will reveal. When assessment is done from a culture of accountability, this anxiety can be related to fear of criticism and judgements regarding value, ability, and role based on that assessment data. However, an assessment culture of improvement that is truly equity-minded should address these fears by acknowledging that everyone makes mistakes, nobody is perfect, and rather than shine a light on imperfections assessment data helps everyone see what is being done well, where there are opportunities to do better, and what can be learned from practices used by peers. It is a tool to better the teaching and learning process, to guide programs and departments towards reaching their goals, and help institutions achieve their missions. Doing this well requires a certain level of vulnerability and openness for feedback. Leaders at WCU were able to turn the fear of vulnerability into strength by creating an open, transparent system of data-sharing where those involved know they are contributing data to a system that will use those data to improve students' outcomes; not to criticize.

"Faculty tend to think '*oh my gosh, my students just thrive! They're so good! They're so well! There's no disparity because I know how to teach all students and all things!*' And that's normal, right, 'cause, you know, I think we all do that, right? Like the 'I'm great!' mentality can be positive, but… it's important to ensure those involved that there's no consequence to sharing data. There will be no retaliation. Here's the data and it is what is it. But, the environment has to be such that if [the data aren't] what you imagined or would want it to be, then we have to all be open to conversations about opportunities to improve. And be open to take, like, professional development opportunities when needed, and, like, learn from peers, and that sort of thing. But it really needs to be said that the process is for everyone to improve, right? To get better for our students. And sometimes we can't get better without making mistakes and learning from them, right? It'd be nice

to be perfect, but that's just not reality."

<div align="right">-Carol</div>

It is also useful to keep in mind that fear can mean different things to different people. For example, Kevin described what fear of an initiative failing means for faculty compared to administrators,

"Fear looks different from an administrator than it does from a faculty member. Fear from an administrator perspective if you're not producing results that lead to those indicators that your chancellor's office or your president's office are looking for—like those retention numbers, the grade-point average, the reduction in academic probation. If you're not making headway in those areas it's possible for you to: a) lose your funding; b) lose support; or c) lose your job. If you're faculty, and faculty are driving the approach and you've received buy-out time to lead this initiative, then the worst thing that's going to happen [if you fail] is you're going to go back to your job. Right? You go back to teaching full time."

Kevin also noted that students have a lot at stake, and thus a lot to fear from what we do and what these data say, as well. And that should not be forgotten.

"It's also about students' fears. And I can't—I want to say failure isn't an option for them. Especially in today's world. [College] is a very expensive venture for our students and the last thing I want to do is have them jumping through a hoop that's explorative and doesn't *actually* do anything to support them. And it's not just 'do no harm'. It's 'help them be successful'. So, I think there's a focus there on, uh, on also the student knowing that they should be getting support programs that are actually supporting them not just researching them, because why would students then participate if they don't get benefit? Opportunity

cost, you know. Could be [doing] something better with their time that will actually

help."

<div align="right">-Kevin</div>

People tend to be risk averse, and chances are they will not be involved in projects or initiatives that can cause them to get in trouble. Institutions and programs hoping to instill equity-minded assessment practices need to be proactive in addressing any potential fears, hesitations, and aversions faculty, staff, and administrators involved may have before any assessment initiative is planned and subsequently enacted. Be clear about what will happen if the project does not go as planned so everyone understands if there will be repercussions. Ensure participants are engaged by explaining what is at stake in this project for the stakeholders who will be impacted. What room to experiment and fail will the project have? And tie it to larger institutional goals whenever possible to show alignment with other initiatives and help garner support.

It became a point at WCU as part of the assessment culture to not let failure—or even the risk and fear of failure—be a hindrance to equity-minded assessment. There is a strong track record at WCU for supporting pilot studies to help incubate and test ideas that will help improve teaching and learning. It is part of the institution's culture of improvement. Do all of these pilots work? No, of course not. But they emphasize trying, learning from mistakes, and supporting promising ideas.

"What we do have is a rich history of learning from our mistakes and an environment
that promotes courageous questioning and the implementation of large pilots to determine
what needs to be modified for future students who may come to us with similar lived

experiences and who also approach their engagement with our institution in 'this way'

whatever *this* is."

<div align="right">-Emma</div>

This 'courageous questioning' is part of WCU's assessment culture, it's data-driven approach to

problem-solving, and its dedication to equity by highlighting the constant pursuit of not just

improving but improving practice for students who are experiencing inequitable returns on their

education.

> "For example, there is no 'one size fits all.' We all know that, but then we think a pilot
>
> must become institutionalized for all students and if it doesn't, it was a failure. That kind
>
> of thinking, in and of itself, disregards equity and the purpose of assessment. When pilots
>
> are thoughtfully constructed with outcomes that emphasize high achievement for all
>
> participants, [use] multiple methods that do not disregard the student's lived experience,
>
> and are aligned with thoughtful selection of institutional equity performance indicators,
>
> improvement for the students can be made."

<div align="right">-Emma</div>

It is alright to implement strategies that help small sections of the student population instead of

changing everything all at once. It is okay to try something and find it did not work as intended.

The largest failure institutions can make is letting fear stop them from doing anything at all.

It is also important to acknowledge that students have fears themselves when it comes to

assessment and demonstrating what they know and can do. Sometimes easing some of that fear is

as simple as allowing students to show a bit of themselves in their learning. To find ways to help

students better engage with the assessment process in ways which are appropriate for them. With

this in mind, it became a goal at West Coast University to ease students' anxieties and fears

related to assessment by instilling asset-based approaches within their equity-minded assessment.

"Once [students are] here, then we need to capitalize on this cultural and linguistic

wealth that, for example, Latinx students bring. Okay? Our classroom assessment should

leverage these when possible. And again, someone else will say 'Well, what about other

students?' right? And it's like, okay, good for them, but right now we're focusing on

what are we are doing to become better about making sure we use Latinx students' skills,

identities, and their, their sense of selves to better the learning process of—guess what?—

all students. If we allow students to express their learning and get those learning

outcomes in ways that also involve aspects of *them*, then wow! Imagine! What a valuable

thing, right? And here we have so many diverse students. And now I'm getting to know

so many students across the campus—so many of them bilingual—and we feel that

should be acknowledged or valued, and captured as a skill in assessment or at least

allowing it to be used or, or recognized in some way."

-Mayra

It is important to be asset-based when doing equity work since this inherently involved being

aware of student differences. But the ways in which those differences are highlighted,

acknowledged, and leveraged to improve the learning of all students, both in and out of the

classroom, is important. This closely relates to Ladson-Billings' notion of culturally relevant

pedagogy (1995a, 1995b) and Montenegro and Jankowski's (2017) assertion of culturally

responsive assessment. At the end of the day, assessment is conducted by people—by human

beings. So it is not free of assumptions, biases, norms, and/or preferences in doing things. So part

of this asset-based approach is checking any possible deficit thinking towards certain students.

"But, ah, with the idea that there's not *assumptions* based on *why* [students] have a certain thing. You know? Like, people think there's not an assumption why this student is getting an A and another is getting an F. You know? I mean, I think it's really, *really* important, especially through an equity lens, to gather and look at data while keeping those things in check. Right? Because that's so frequent that people make mass generalizations of the—you name it—student ability based on one or two outlier students that they've experienced before. It can certify in their minds a certain narrative that they already had about certain students they're serving that, well, it just makes my stomach feel sick because everyone does it all the time. And so, I think I am very contentious of us [being aware] of that when we assess, when we analyze assessment data, and so on. Because it's unfair to the student, and it messes with the impact of the assessment and learning process, really."

-George

"I feel like, in terms of leading instructors through working with our student demographics, I notice when we're in a meeting and someone says 'none of the students came to class on time!' or, you know, like, 'No one turned in their homework!' Like, that's not accurate. You know? It's very much, I think, seeing through the lens of their assumptions about the student population they are serving. Because it can be easy to fall into those narratives with these students who already have narratives in the literature of, like, being disengaged and at-risk compared to others. And, so, I think it's really important to make sure we're specific in how we're talking *about* these students and *to* these students; and that our narratives are as connected to actual data as possible."

-Caroline

Having an asset-based approach instilled in those conducting assessment helps to eliminate deficit-thinking regarding the student populations being served. Otherwise, this deficit thinking can work towards widening equity gaps impacting different student populations (Milner, 2012; Bensimon, 2005) because the interpretations made of assessment data will reflect those deficit-based ideas. This mental shift takes intentionality. It requires that those conducting assessment actively work to keep those assumptions and potentially biased perceptions about students in check. It even involves being aware of how we talk about students and the language we use.

> "We've gone through everybody's projects and, uh, looked at similar language that people were using; like 'at-risk population' when talking about our students. And, and so, we invited people to rethink that, um, that lens. Like, you know, you as a student are *at risk* in this environment that we created where all these other students have been successful, you know? And so, I think this year we may be taking that perspective one step further to say 'let's think about inclusive excellence'. Let's think about, you know, taking a good look at your data and those gaps in terms of these underserved populations and seeing where you might be able to make some gains."

-Carol

In the pursuit of embedding equity-mindedness throughout the assessment processes, there had to be a change in mentality for those conducting assessment at West Coast University. They did this by looking at the fears of those involved and seeing where their weaknesses could be opportunities to develop strengths. Now, instead of being barriers to conducting equity-minded assessment, the fear of failure and deficit thinking have been used to create fearless and equitable assessment processes. Empowering those conducting assessment to be vulnerable,

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address potential shortcomings, and develop an asset-based mentality has created important

supports for their equity-minded assessment process. Not only are faculty, staff, and

administrators involved with assessment better able to approach assessment from an equity

perspective, but they also create more equitable learning environments that allow students to see

equity-mindedness at WCU as genuine. As Luis, a Latinx student in the program expressed,

> "It just feels different, in a good way. Like, I see what I do, what I share, and, like, what
>
> I learn, is having a[n] effect. Like not just with me, but with others in the course, too. I
>
> feel I can be myself and not, like, I don't know, like, in some classes it feels pressure to
>
> be a model student and prove myself, you know? Like, kind of, like, put up a front. Does
>
> that make sense? But [in the seminar] I'm me, and they see me, and help *me*. And that's
>
> made a difference, definitely, for me, to like, I don't know, like have a good—not just in
>
> the [seminar] course, but overall— like, have a good experience."

So not only are these approaches helping administrators, faculty, and staff do assessment more

equitably, but they are also helping students of color feel the effects of those equitable practices.

For freshmen students of color who commute to campus, having a good college experience and

feeling connected to the campus, and being seen for who they are have important implications

for their college success (Pokorny, Holley, & Kane, 2017; Harper, Smith, & Davis, 2018). By

approaching equity-minded assessment through a lens that takes away assessment practitioner's

anxiety toward the process allows them to conduct more equitable assessments, change teaching

and programming to better serve students experiencing inequities, and places students in better

positions to succeed. Assessing without fear and using this approach to turn weaknesses into

strengths has been an important support for equity-minded assessment at West Coast University.

Getting Our Affairs in Order: Student Affairs Drives the Work

Traditionally, assessment in higher education has been misleadingly considered an academic affairs 'thing'; but this was mainly because the two sides of the house were not in active communication with one another (Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2010). Assessment of student learning outcomes was often viewed as something that happens in the classroom and/or done by academic affairs administrators for external accountability. However, that perspective has been flawed, especially given the acknowledgement that meaningful learning happens outside of the classroom, as well (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and student affairs has been actively engaged in the assessment of these co-curricular learning opportunities (Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2010;. Over time, student affairs has gotten their well-deserved recognition for their involvement in the assessment of student learning, and there are professional organizations supporting the practice (e.g. the Student Affairs Assessment Leaders (SAAL)). The problem is that even in instances where assessment does happen in student affairs, data is not always shared across the hall to connect it with academic affairs; and vice versa. The siloed nature of higher education does not only affect communication and collaboration between departments, but between the student and academic affairs personnel *within* departments, as well.

This case of West Coast University is a great example of assessment efforts occurring in student affairs, and how collaboration with academic affairs can help reach common goals such as improving teaching, supporting learning, and increasing equity through assessment. In WCU, academic affairs has been doing assessment for years, but not from the culture of improvement and equity-mindedness from which WCU's student affairs personnel have approached it. Academic affairs assessment at WCU is just beginning to change towards a culture of

improvement largely due to turnover in administration. However changing the culture has been slow, and assessment in academic affairs has not been equity-minded.

 "Assessment here is really—it's a tale not of two cities but of two levels. At the top level is sort of the traditional program assessment which suffers from all the things that you read about in *Inside Higher Ed*. Like, not actually measuring learning [outcomes] and that sort of stuff. Um, that we're struggling with a little bit that if we can really figure out how to continue to improve that level [then] there will be strong dividends in terms of closing some of these achievement gaps that will then help close graduation and retention rates. You know, all of these institutional metrics that academic affairs traditionally cares for. So, we've done this 'hunt for stupid', right? I like to call it 'the hunt for stupid'— searching for like what's the low hanging fruit that can be done with assessment to increase metrics like graduation rates. What are the institutional things we should probably stop doing, like we should probably stop putting library holds or registration holds on students who have library fines. Like we're worried about the money… but if they don't get their classes, then they're not going to graduate. And now that we're running out of stupid stuff it's time for the difficult conversations. Like, uh, how are we making our classrooms inclusive? How are we doing transparent teaching and assessment? How are we engaging students in assessment? That's the area where I think there's real potential for growth in academic affairs and where we would be dumb to not take a page from the, ah, from assessment in student affairs."

-George

The good news is that assessment in academic affairs is changing to align closer to the student affairs approach; becoming more student-centered and used to improve deeper campus issues

beyond retention and graduation rates. It is embedding more elements of equity-minded assessment.

 "Student affairs does all kinds of stuff with assessment for equity, which academic affairs are just now getting around. This is because the [academic affairs] conversation for years has been on graduation rates and retention rates. Especially from previous leadership. They had that culture going. And that definition of student success does not necessarily lend itself to deeply answer equity questions. It often leads to enrollment initiatives, right? That kind of superficial—and it doesn't even clearly align with, uh, with the faculty members' definition of student success, right; which tends to be very course-based. So, there's been a little bit of disconnect. We're trying to sort of make that connection now of how can we get students more engaged in their learning which assessment is a part of. Because, in my opinion, an engaged student is a retained student is then a graduated student, so it matters for those larger goals. But the way in which that's done matters…

And when we look at our practice across academic affairs, college student success teams have sprouted up and they're currently doing their own local 'hunt for stupid', right? Or hunt for improvement in low hanging fruit. Looking at curriculum maps—and this isn't really student-centered assessment as much as it is self-assessment of like '*huh, so here's the map that we give students that if they take these classes in four years they'll know this*'. But when we really step back, we're noticing that we're putting these four courses scheduled at the same time! So things that are unintentional that make local sense to an individual but from a student-centered [perspective] they haven't—we haven't been very student-centered or equitable in that way. So, I am really, I like how we're starting to

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make that turn from the classic 'college ready student' mindset towards [being a] 'student ready campus', which is what student affairs has been doing for a while—and using it to inform assessment. But it, it's a lot of change in academic affairs from that perspective. And if it's one thing that higher education is not very good at is changing fast. So as you can imagine it's been slow, which is why this initiative and working with the people involved has been great."

-George

It is no surprise, then, that this case seeking to improve the learning outcomes of commuter students who are experiencing inequitable outcomes compared to residential students began in student affairs. WCU's student affairs department has led initiatives focused on campus culture, inclusivity, and even on better embedding the Hispanic Serving Institution mission into campus programming. So when they noticed that commuter students were experiencing inequitable outcomes compared to their freshmen peers who lived in campus residence halls, student affairs used equity-minded assessment to help.

The important element of this, however, is that while student affairs lead the way in equity-minded assessment approaches, the case was very collaborative between student affairs and academic affairs personnel. The main leads in the case are a student affairs administrator overseeing programming for commuter and residential students, an academic affairs administrator overseeing assessment at the institution level, and a faculty member with a background on assessment and a passion for equity work. The rest of the team was rounded out with staff and administrators from both student affairs and academic affairs. There are two data maestros—one from a student affairs background and another from an academic affairs

background—that help answer all of the team's questions providing analyses, different perspectives, and connecting it to large institutional data sets and goals.

> "It's a bit of an ad-hoc-cracy. You have Fernando who's been doing analyses and
> supporting and entire division. Emma who has three units of release time through my
> office to own this and design the curriculum. Kevin who just runs everything basically.
> But it's been growing. Um, there's that churn we were talking about, bringing in more
> partners, more collaborators, the instructors themselves, it really has been kind of a—
> it takes a village. One that is supportive, fills different needs, and is willing to challenge
> one another when necessary."

-George

Challenges, Opportunities, and Next Steps for WCU

Since student affairs has such a strong lead in the use of equity-minded assessment at WCU, this has led to a lack of balance in the involvement of faculty in the case. While there is a significant academic affairs presence, this is largely through administrators. Emma is the sole faculty member on the team. As Cindy noted, faculty would like to get more involved, and there needs to be more opportunities for faculty to have an active role in the case.

> "There's no academic faculty [in the seminar]. It's a joke. I mean. All respect to the
> experience being provided, but the seminar course is completely disconnected from
> academic programs. What does it mean that there's no contact with people who are life-
> long dedicated knowledge makers? And that life-long dedicated knowledge-makers have
> no contact with incoming folk—kids?... Do you ask faculty if they want to be in a room
> with 20 freshmen? Do you know what it's like to teach a 20 student class? People would
> jump at the opportunity. So our faculty are not—our academic faculty are not involved in

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the seminar. At all. You need people with terminal degrees, subject matter experts who understand the commitments of academia. 'Cause it's a way of being we're trying to teach here. A contemplative, humanistic, knowledge-driven, inquiry-driven way of being. Anyway. I love this program. I want it and the students to all to succeed, but…"

Emma did state that while there is not faculty involvement in teaching the course, there is plenty of faculty involvement in planning it, developing curricula, and informing practice. The graduate students who serve as instructors are trained by faculty and receive weekly support and orientation from faculty.

"George's division gave me a very small summer stipend and, and I suggested let's invite other faculty into this design. Um. Because if we do this well, then we can potentially influence the success of other students who are identified as 'at opportunity.' And so, we did that. And a lot of things went wrong, and some things went right. And, so, we flipped the classroom. We brought in other faculty and staff experts, um, and they were, you know, [chosen] intentionally to not only bring their rich expertise but to really, I think, I had this assumption that students really don't—because I've had students tell me *'we had no idea you faculty thought so much about the design of this course or the design of the curriculum we did not know so many people were involved in this experience'*. So we brought faculty to help with design, show the instructors best practices, and offer trainings."

-Emma

While the seminar course was designed by faculty, Cindy brings a good point that there's an important element which faculty bring to such settings. When it comes to students of color, students from marginalized populations, and students who feel a low sense of belonging with the

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institution, having the opportunity to develop a connection with a faculty member can make a difference (Gloria, & Robinson Kurpius, 2001; Asay, 2019; Griffin, Pérez, Holmes, & Mayo, 2010).

> "Also think about continuity. I don't know what your freshmen orientation or first-year seminar experience was. I didn't have a first—oh no I did; I had an honors kind of intro seminar. But I had a freshmen orientation where I met a really wonderful and important professor who made a lifelong impact on me. And I'm not saying that the instructors in the seminar aren't doing the same, but like, this is someone who had, well, to me to be in the room with someone who had published a book, showed interest, and gave me the opportunity to interact in a close setting was an entirely new thing. An entirely helpful thing."

> -Cindy

Among the reasons for this disparity in faculty involvement, case participants cited resource constraints (Emma) and issues with getting faculty to understand assessment from an improvement and equity-minded lens (Caroline). These are largely elements of the larger institutional context, but are still affecting the collaboration between academic and student affairs in this case. Through various points in the interview, Emma shared she had to wait to be brought on board until her faculty time could be bought out from her department since resources such as funding, personnel themselves, and time are very limited on campus. They initially wanted Emma to help teach the course, but they could not afford to buy out more time, nor did they have the dedicated funds to bring in more faculty. All in all, the program is only costing the institutions approximately $5,500 per semester, but without dedicated funds it has become challenging to fill that faculty need.

In regards to the faculty's assessment perspective, Caroline shared:

"We had a very large push in this institution in the mid-2000's around student learning outcomes, um, as result of an accreditation review. A lot of faculty still see student learning outcomes as something that they know they're supposed to have on the syllabus [but] they don't really understand. Like they know what they are, right? But they don't understand why they matter. Like, what is the value in crafting good student learning outcomes? How do learning outcomes relate to assessment? So, that's a conversation I have learned to have with faculty from a 'this is good for your students' perspective to get them to see assessment for improvement and then start to implement some equity in there. Um, and it has been very interesting to try to bring faculty along, um, in that thinking when they have, sort of, almost a bad gut reaction to the terms 'student learning outcomes.'"

The way in which most faculty at the institution approach assessment also made it difficult to significantly seek their involvement in a project that heavily relies on equity-minded assessment for improvement. As Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) note, a lot of the equity-minded assessment process relies on having student learning outcomes which are themselves equitable: written in student friendly language, are measurable, and have meaning for students not just the department. So, if faculty are having issues understanding the value of learning outcomes for assessment, they will have issue with conducting equity-minded assessment.

Another related challenge affecting West Coast University is the lack of opportunity for expanding their equity-minded assessment model across the campus. Due to the predominant faculty mentality towards assessment, it may be difficult to scale and sustain these practices across the institution to benefit other student populations; at least not quickly. In addition, Cindy

also shared a sentiment that seems to be prevalent with faculty and academic affairs administration and staff at WCU regarding the role of students within the assessment process:

"I'm kind of old fashion in that I don't believe that students are qualified to set academic related and disciplinary related outcomes. I'm really old school in that regard. I mean, like, we and faculty can say those things. We can say with confidence you'll be in a better position to problem solve and innovate due to this class or degree. And I don't know what students want. How would they would view success? Because right now when we say student success we mean graduation. So, that is where I'd like student input: on the mega-outcomes. Like what are their whole person outcomes. I mean, [students are only] 19! So I am old fashioned that they don't know. But they do know like what their communities need and what kinds of jobs they want to get, so they can help us by giving us insight into those areas. But setting outcomes, assessing, and that sort of—no. Nuh uh. And I think that's a popular opinion. I might be wrong, but that's my sense here."

This is concerning given that Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) say there is no equity-minded assessment without also having student-focused assessment. That is to say, students must have an active role in the assessment process—students' voices must be present throughout the assessment process—in order to ensure equity. What Cindy is describing, and alluding to being a sentiment shared by the faculty, is that faculty and administrators know best; especially when it comes to learning outcomes. Montenegro and Jankowski (2017; 2020) directly refute this kind of logic by exposing traditional approaches of assessment as being processes that are done by faculty and administrators for faculty and administrators; students are simply the passive objects of assessment. Well, to have equity-minded assessment, students must be active participants in the process. If WCU's commuter program is to break silos and grow, then there will need to be

more resonance between the ways in which the larger institutional student affairs and academic affairs departments approach assessment. The good news is that these challenges are opportunities for growth and continued improvement, some of which are already being problem solved by case participants.

Midwest University: The Larger Institutional Context

Midwest University (MU) is a medium urban private not-for-profit doctoral university founded in the late 1800's. MU's enrolls almost 9,000 students in total, 46% of which are undergraduate students. MU originally was founded as an institution devoted to serve adult learners, but has recently added an undergraduate college to its programming. However, its undergraduate enrollment is still slightly older than 'traditional' college age students since the average age is 30. Since making the decision to admit undergraduate students, undergraduate enrollment has been steadily growing and is currently comprised of approximately 73% women, 63% students of color, and 61% Pell-eligible students (see Table 4 for a further breakdown of student enrollment by race/ethnicity). In recent years, the institution has been named one of the 25 most diverse colleges and universities in the United States by the U.S News and World Report.

Similarly to West Coast University, the high percentage of students of color enrolled at MU brings with it an inherent responsibility to serve these students through graduation. This responsibility is felt throughout the case; openly expressed by study participants and reflected in MU's policies and strategic goals. MU's overall six-year graduation rate is 30% with an increase to 58% for the eight-year rate according to 2019 data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) database. This speaks to an important discrepancy in helping students get to the finish line in a timely fashion.

Table 4

MU's 2019 Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	% of Undergraduate Enrollment
Asian	2%
Black/African American	22%
Latinx/Hispanic	27%
Multiple Ethnicities	2%
Native American or Alaskan Native	0%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0%
Non-Resident Alien	3%
White	37%
Other/Not Declared	6%

Note. The total does not equal exactly 100% due to rounding up/down of the numbers to safeguard the institution's identity. These data are adapted from 2019 data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) database.

Increasing the graduation rate is an important driver for case participants, but the priority is doing it in ways that are meaningful for the students. That is to say, they will not sacrifice ensuring students are well-supported and developed just to make sure those statistics are brought up. The numeric breakdown of graduation rates by race/ethnicity, gender, and Pell-eligibility are not publicly available, but MU divulged that there is high variability between populations. Overall, the institution is dealing with challenges when it comes to graduating males; with an increased emphasis on Black undergraduate students. MU is doing a good job graduating Latinx students (over 60% graduate within six years of enrollment), but has a 30% graduation rate for 'non-resident alien' students. Since their 'non-resident alien' student population is predominantly Latinx, there is a significant discrepancy between the supports these populations get through to graduation. The graduation rate for white students is on par with national statistics (approximately 64% for the national 2010 cohort according to NCES (2018) data). There is

definitely room for improvement in helping students graduate within six-years, but given its mission of increasing access and nurturing opportunity for students, it is important to contextualize these statistics with the fact that MU works with students to find their best possible fit in higher education; even if it is not necessarily at MU. They facilitate approximately 33% of students transfer to other institutions (both two-year and four-year colleges) that will better meet students' needs. They also work with students who are dealing with personal troubles to take term- or year-long breaks before ultimately resuming their education.

Midwest University officially received the Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) designation in 2016 after its enrollment quickly surged with Latinx students the few years prior. Recognizing the responsibility this designation entrusted in the institution, MU leveraged both the HSI mission and its commitment to serving the community to create a pathways program with a local community college. Students within a specific major in the two-year institution can easily transfer to MU and attain a bachelor's degree within four years; greatly increasing the impact of their education while also diminishing their expenses due to the decreased time-to-degree. Included in the program is peer mentoring for students who transfer, dedicated tutoring, and focused career counseling. It is important to note that even though this program is funded through the HSI designation grant, students from all populations can transfer and participate in the program.

The Pursuit of Equity at MU

At MU, equity is interwoven into the university mission. Instead of opting for just a diversity statement or standalone equity value in their mission and values statement, MU has embedded equity throughout each of their institutional value statements. This includes a focus on access for marginalized populations, serving the community, using a student-first approach,

respecting diverse ways of knowing, and approaching education through a social justice lens. Embedding equity throughout these elements of MU's mission was intentional, so as to not make it seem as if equity work is only relevant for one area of work, or if equity is one value amongst many. Instead, this hopes to send the message that regardless of what is happening in the institution, there should be an awareness of any and all inequities and an action plan to ensuring all students succeed regardless of background.

> "When doing work around equity, it's really important that we know our audience, we know our demographic, that we understand their concerns, and what their hopes and dreams and desires are. What their barriers and challenges are. And that our work becomes to overcome them—that [through] our work we help to overcome those and create a level playing field, kind of thing, between our target demographic; whether it's first-gen and not first-gen students, Black, food insecure, or Latino Latina."

-Sofia

Midwest University believes that in order to truly understand and serve students, the institution has to be involved in helping the communities in which their students live. In recent years, MU has received national recognition for its community and civic service, exemplifying the institution's commitment to not just understanding but also engaging its students and staff in responding to local needs. These student-focused and intentional approaches are what define equity at Midwest University, and are crucial elements which allow the case to occur.

The Focused MU Case Context: Meeting the Needs of Commuter Students of Color through Assessment

The case of MU offers a program-level view of the supports, motivators, and approaches that allow MU to better serve undergraduate commuter students of color. The focus is the

undergraduate program, which can be thought of as a college within the larger university. For example, as some large universities have a college of education or an engineering college, we can think of this case as the undergraduate college within MU. Similar to West Coast University, for the sake of simplicity, when this study speaks about MU, or the institution, it is referring to the specific case. It is important to note is that the undergraduate program is tailored to serve freshman and sophomore students. The experiences of junior and sophomore students differ than those expressed in this case. Also, virtually every student attending MU is a commuter student who lives with their family away from campus. So, when this study speaks about MU's students, it is primarily referring to their first- and second-year students who commute to campus.

Similar to West Coast University, assessment at Midwest University also relies on the Kuh et al. (2015a) conceptualization of assessment and related processes. MU has a deeply rooted assessment culture focused on improvement. Learning outcomes are aligned across the institution—program outcomes are aligned to institution outcomes, and course outcomes are aligned to both program and larger institution outcomes. This helps to ensure that learning experiences in and outside of the classroom build towards the larger overall skills students are expected to know by the time they graduate. To ensure these experiences are scaffolding off of each other, MU designed the undergraduate program through an intensive mapping exercise across the curriculum with guidance from the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP)—a learning framework colleges and universities can use to demonstrate the outcomes and skills students should know and be able to do when they earn an associate, bachelor's, or master's degree (Adelman, Ewell, Gaston, & Schneider, 2014).

"We wrote out the entire DQP on these walls; all over. We wrote out the entire thing!

Um and so, really, we were trying to figure out what was a framework that makes sense,

and I think for me, because we don't really have a set of standards across the entire nation

of what's expected from a student learning outcome perspective, right, we felt like [the

DQP] was a really nice framework for *us* to build around. To create that common set

of—not standards but—understanding for *us*, right? And it gave us a lot of flexibility.

The DQP is not prescribed. Like it doesn't say 'a student will do this, this and this'. No.

And it was a very nice guide for us. And it was customizable. So, we build our sixth

theme which is professional skills since our students told us that's something they need

from their experience here."

-Diana

Using the DQP as a launching point for the program also helped inform their larger

assessment practices. After building outcomes and articulating the competencies students should

have, these were explicitly present in every single assignment, in every single rubric, and in

every single class. The point of this is to help students better connect their experiences and see

them scaffolding atop of each other instead of being disconnected experiences.

"Students can see '*oh I'm building a professional skill*' or '*I'm being assessed on this*

professional skill right now'. And, so, [having] the same language throughout [and]

having that be ever-present has been really incredibly useful for students because they

know '*oh, this is another class where I'm going to be practicing problem solving*' or '*it's*

heavy on negotiation'. So, we built the rubrics that way so students would see a

consistent message throughout. They could see the tread. Also, this helps them to get

away from the mentality of [general education courses] are a checklist. Like, '*Ok I took*

the science I don't care about the science but I took it because I had to'. And instead

really see that in science—or in any Gen Ed—you're building the same skills that you

would be building in other courses. Students can see they're working towards something, kind of like seeing the pieces for the whole."

-Diana

Learning outcomes alignment has been regarded as good assessment for a long time (Jankowski & Marshall, 2014; Hutchings, 2016; Jankowski & Marshall, 2017), but this intentionality in also explicitly aligning course assignments and rubrics to those outcomes furthers the impact of this practice. A benefit of rubrics—good rubrics—is they allow students to clearly see what is expected of them (Benjamin et al, 2012; Richman & Ariovich, 2013; Ford, 2016; Rorrer & Richards, 2020). Good rubrics take this further from an awareness of what is expected toward also allowing students to use rubrics to better self-evaluate their own work. Aligning learning assessments and assessment tools to learning outcomes furthers these impacts by raising awareness of how the assessment/tool relates to larger overall skills while also allowing students to self-evaluate not just on the basis of the assignment but on the basis of the outcome, as well.

Finally, Midwest University has a data- and evidence-driven culture which centers assessment and assessment data in the case's operations and decision making. Leveraging its assessment for improvement culture, practitioners in MU hold regular faculty meetings during the academic term to review learning outcomes data across the program, departments, and course groups. These spaces help faculty develop deeper understanding of how students are performing, how other faculty are implementing promising practices to help students, and highlight possible areas for improvement. Instead of using assessment data to make value judgements on faculty preparation and ability, these data are used within MU to center the student experience and how faculty can improve upon it. Discrepancies and poor outcomes are approached as opportunities for deeper conversations regarding why that may be. Data are disaggregated by student

populations—beyond just race/ethnicity but also the intersection of student characteristics with variables such as major, year, specific competencies, etc. Findings from these meetings empower faculty to make curricular changes in-real time during the academic term, as well as identify opportunities for future professional development, policy changes, and other evidence-based interventions if issues are more widespread.

MU's Approach to Equity-Minded Assessment

The approach to equity-minded assessment at Midwest University centers on acknowledging and respecting diverse ways of knowing. As a result, assessment at MU focuses on capturing a more appropriate understanding of what students know and can do. First and foremost, it is evident that MU's equity-minded assessment is centered on tenets of critical assessment and assessment for social justice. Being fully aware of the student population served, MU's assessment approach not only disaggregates data, but it also goes above and beyond to involve the student voice in the assessment process, equip those conducting assessment to be aware of biases and systems of power/oppression, and use assessment to uncover, understand, and ultimately remedy inequities.

Staying true to its data-driven approach, assessment data is placed directly in the hands of MU's faculty and students. Not only are faculty regularly briefed on how students are performing across their courses along various outcomes and variables, but students also receive their own reports along their progress and performance on specific outcomes. Student reports are written in student friendly language, and focus on allowing students to take a deeper role in their education path. Students can see they might be struggling on analytic inquiry, but have to take two courses next term that align to that outcome then students can take preemptive action.

Students can seek tutoring, speak to faculty, or find other resources to help them improve their performance on that outcome so they do not struggle in forthcoming courses.

An important element of making this work, of course, is making sure students understand the outcomes themselves; what do they mean and why do they matter. Without this understanding, students can have all of the data on their performance on analytic inquiry but be unmotivated to take an active role in improving since they do not see its relevance. Midwest University, as noted previously, aligns learning experiences to outcomes and makes these explicit on assignments and assessment tools. But this awareness does not ensure understanding. As a result, MU's students have the necessary understanding on their expected outcomes by writing and expressing them in student friendly language. Periodic focus groups with students are conducted each academic year to ensure outcomes are understandable by students. They ask students to 'translate' outcomes in their words, share any confusion, express how they see these outcomes meeting their needs for career expectations, and explore what other outcomes might be of interest. Traditionally, assessment's focus on learning outcomes has been regarding alignment and making them measurable. This extra step to ensure outcomes are also written in student friendly language and are meaningful for students is an essential aspect of equity-minded assessment (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017; 2020).

Midwest University has a strong feedback loop which supports and encompasses assessment efforts. Just like giving quality feedback to students on assignments is an important element of assessment (Jankowski, 2017; Marzetti, 2015; Muller et al., 2019; Richman & Ariovich, 2013), MU takes this a step further by opening formal and informal feedback loops between faculty, staff, and students. Recognizing that students of color and first-generation students may not be comfortable offering direct feedback to faculty that may be critical of their

practice but would help with improvement, there are indirect feedback channels through advisors, mentors, and coaches who can compile that information as part of MU's assessment process. The use of formative assessment that takes place during the semester or academic term is stressed at MU in order to give students, faculty, and staff the proper opportunity to adjust in time to allow those students offering the feedback the opportunity to benefit from those changes. To further facilitate the feedback process, adaptive learning technology is used at MU with embedded places where faculty can provide quality feedback to students on their work. Students can also insert reflections on the course, the assignment, or specific lessons that can help faculty improve. Then, since the technology is adaptive, faculty can use student reflections and grades to alter the course as needed to better prepare students along the course's outcomes. Midwest University's rationale for using adaptive learning tools is explained by Diana:

"We felt that adaptive tools created a really good feedback loop so that students can go home, they can practice and they get immediate feedback right away. Instead of having to wait a week or two weeks to get a grade from their instructor they're getting feedback all the time; and that feedback actually goes both ways. So [students] are getting feedback from the adaptive tool, but then the instructor is getting data on student progress. So, the instructor doesn't have to spend all three hours that they're in the classroom trying to assess informally every single student and how they're doing. They can actually look at the report before they get into class and see, okay, here is where students are struggling and here is a learning [outcome] that only 4% of our students got. So, [faculty] can then put that in. That was kind of the impetus for the adaptive part."

-Diana

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Along with formative feedback, NU's normative feedback is also conducted from an equity perspective. Andy, a former faculty member who is now an administrator in academic affairs, shared how normative assessment is approached and used at MU:

"At the end of each term we're not trying to, like, um, punish people. Like, we aren't collecting data to shame anyone, right? Can the data say things about, like, or inform promotion or [highlight] performance? Sure. But it can't be about just that. So, what we're trying to do is get a sense of are there things that're working better? Are the things that are more effective at helping underrepresented students kind of develop these outcomes and skills? Were there faculty who really excelled at helping, like, lets say Latinx students and can we partner them with this faculty who has been struggling with them? Like, what are, kind of, the common needs, too right? Because I think that's the other thing, you know, like, one student might just need literally someone to sit down with them and make, like, a plan for the week of when they're going to get their work done. You know? It's that kind of non-cognitive time management and it might really be the thing that changes them to, like, be on a successful path. And then, another student really might need, you know some, some pretty serious help on, like, organization or brainstorming or something like that. So, it helps us to see if we can identify, like, the practices that really are successful with different students so we aren't trying to use a one-size-fits-all; which can be easy to try to do when interpreting data."

-Andy

This combination of both formative and summative assessment is established good assessment practice. However, the approach at MU where both are used simultaneously improve the institution, the quality of education, and the experience of students of color and other diverse

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learners is the essence of equity-minded assessment. The goal of using assessment to address inequities and improve the chances of success for diverse learners is always at the forefront at MU.

Since the majority of assessment opportunities occur in the classroom, there are faculty groups at MU which discuss topics that can make course assessment more equitable. These faculty groups discuss topics such as cultural relevancy, social justice, the role of power and oppression in the classroom, student cultural wealth, and other related topics in order to raise faculty awareness and give them the tools needed to approach assessment from an equity-minded perspective. These groups create safe spaces for faculty who may be uncomfortable having these discussions or those who have never had to have these discussions before ask questions and learn. The reality is that equity-minded assessment cannot happen if those conducting assessment are not versed in issues of equity, how they manifest in academia, nor how some practices regarded as 'standard' can serve to perpetuate inequity. Faculty need to understand why these concepts matter and how they relate to assessment. Opportunities such as these allow for those connections to be made, and then turn faculty into leaders in this approach.

Equity-mindedness is not just something that should be a concern in society or when having conversations that are strictly about race and racism. An equity mindset permeates all opportunities and occurrences so that people are aware of inequities as they occur before they grow to become systemic, and then work to resolve them.

"It's an assessment mindset too, right? Or it should be. A mindset of until we know [that] a hundred percent of our students are learning exactly the way we want them to be or expect them to be, then we still have work to do. And assessment helps us see if that's the case or not and for who that's the case or not. And, the same thing that, until we know

that a hundred percent of our students feel completely supported that this is their home and that they can be successful here, then we have work to do. Why not, like, leverage something like assessment that can give us all the data we need to make sure every student is taken care of to help? I think equity and assessment align well, pun intended."

-JayDee

This is a belief that seems to permeate MU, where assessment and equity-mindedness are seen as two concepts that complement each other. An equity mindset strengthens what can be done with assessment data and adds intentionality to how assessment is done, how assessment is used for improvement, and explore who benefits from those improvements. On the other hand, assessment helps institutions, faculty, and assessment practitioners find and address inequities that might be largely unnoticed.

Bringing it Together: Driving and Supporting Equity-Minded Assessment at MU

Given the above discussion about Midwest University and the case context, this section explores two themes that are distinctive to MU: (1) MU's intentional design and (2) the faculty role. These themes give a deeper understanding of two elements that uniquely drive and support how equity-minded assessment is done at MU. These themes were directly informed by case participants and their experiences with equity-minded assessment at MU. As such, themes will be supported by direct quotes from participants whenever appropriate, but will also be situated within larger literature discussions to offer additional context for practice.

Intentional Design

What is distinctive about the Midwest University case is its design. As more and more undergraduate students began to enroll at MU, the institution realized that its undergraduate student population came with various challenges, and did not seem to excel in traditional

classrooms. Empowered by its mission and commitment to serving students, social justice, and acknowledging diverse perspectives, a program was intentionally designed by the institution which would really help all students develop and reach their potential. An interdisciplinary group of administrators and faculty were tasked to design an undergraduate curricula and program that embeds assessment, is driven by data and evidence, and offers holistic supports for students. This motivation to create a holistic environment focused on supporting and developing students creates the perfect setting for equity-minded assessment practices. The program's data-driven emphasis on being evidence-based is furthered by the unique design of its curricular and co-curricular learning experiences. Everything in MU is tailored to improve the impact of assessment and centralize an equity-minded perspective; specifically from the focus of supporting diverse learners. In such an environment, equity-minded assessment that lives up to the tenets of Montenegro and Jankowski (2017, 2020) became second-nature. This theme describes MU's intentional design.

By continuously asking 'who are our students' and 'what are their needs', practitioners at MU are encouraged to reflect, act accordingly, and not grow complacent. Approximately 70% of MU's undergraduate students are enrolled full-time (or full-time equivalent (FTE)), which is a great accomplishment given the average age of its students and the increase in students' responsibilities that come along with that age. Seldom are adult learners able to just focus on school full time compared to traditional-age college students (Ross-Gordon, 2011; Robertson, 2020). MU's FTE rates are purposely achieved through the way its curriculum is designed. Through asking reflective questions such as the two previously noted, Midwest University was able take into consideration students' needs and their actualized experiences to design a program which would better help students succeed. The undergraduate students' schedules are staggered

to accommodate for their employment and familial responsibilities. Instead of having courses available throughout the week, all freshmen and sophomore courses are offered during two week-days from 9am to 4pm, and junior and senior courses are offered on other days. This gives students a set schedule and expectation of what days they will be in school regardless of term; allowing students to better plan ahead for work schedules, child care, and other responsibilities.

"… knowing that the majority of these students would be working in some capacity, we said '*well we need to figure out a schedule that will work for them. How can we design a program that will fit so that they can still have jobs?*' And knowing the market of who's hiring 18-22 year olds on top of that, oftentimes their biggest concerns—as we did some market research—is that students don't show up. They're not reliable. And so we said let's give them the best opportunity to be reliable and know that '*I'm available on Tuesdays or I'm available on Thursdays*', right, '*But I can't work on Monday's and Wednesdays*'. So, we decided to do the block scheduling and be really intentional about that so that, that allows them to be able to work and attend full-time."

-Diana

Since practically the entirety of MU's undergraduate students are commuter students—live at home with family and commute to campus—this staggered curriculum also helps to ensure students do not have to waste much time traveling between home and school, or school and work. Instead, students can expect to be on campus for long stretches of time two days a week. This may seem like a small detail, but when students rely on public transportation to get to class, the time spent on travel alone (sometimes upwards of an hour one-way) can be a huge inconvenience; especially if it is happening twice a day four or five days a week for just one class per day.

This attentiveness to student needs and tailoring offerings to better meet those needs is further demonstrated by the integration of the curricular and co-curricular into one seamless and holistic student learning experience. While student learning mainly happens in the classroom, students are empowered to make use of that knowledge and learn how to apply it through co-curricular supports. Various student organizations are facilitated by faculty or staff members to ensure the organizations are meeting more than a social element for students by focusing on increasing student agency and promoting the application of learning outcomes. For example, Maryanne, an administrator in student affairs, chairs a student leadership club where students decided they needed to know more about social justice and how leaders can use it to improve issues observed in society.

"We put together three social justice workshops for them. And the first one is on, um, social identity. So helping them understand what is your social identity and how that impacts you as a leader. Or how do you use that as a leader. Then we also do the second one is power and oppression. Looking at, okay, this is what society says about you. This is what they see how you are engaging, and stuff like that. But then asking the students or getting them to think about how do you use that? How do you be[come] that advocate? How do you be[come] that sense of support? What is all these ideas in these assumptions and these prejudices and discrimination pieces come from?...And then the last piece we talked about is microaggression. Like, how are you—mind you taking everything that they've learned—and how are you perpetuating that over and over and over again without necessarily intending to, right? And how do we break that cycle? Um, that has been very eye-opening for our students because they never thought about it to this extent before. But it's gotten most of them to become very passionate about it, and they are now

using those lessons and applying them to courses, and in their majors, and I've seen some

other projects. And again it's them planting the seed. I just facilitated with help from

others, and [students] ran away with it."

-Maryanne

Co-curricular experiences like this are intentionally aligned with larger institutional outcomes

like critical thinking, ability to work with diverse others and respect diverse ways of knowing,

and apply concepts to real-world settings. Experiences are designed to empower and encourage

students to step out of their comfort zone, wrestle with complex ideas, and take active roles in

discussions.

Courses at MU use a flipped classroom design to encourage students to be active

participants in their learning, lead discussions, and really demonstrate those expected outcomes.

The rationale and motivation behind flipping the classroom again came from asking those

questions of who the students are and what their needs are. Practitioners at MU realized that their

freshman and sophomore students were not showing the abilities and preparation that could be

expected from their high school grade point averages. MU needed to become more 'student

ready'. One way they decided to do this was by creating small classroom environments that

allow faculty to be attentive to the needs of different students and offers the flexibility to switch

if more time needs to be spent on certain concepts and outcomes.

Leadership at Midwest University also decided to do away with developmental

education. Knowing the potential setbacks and barriers that students face by taking

developmental courses which do not award college credit and extend students' time-to-degree,

MU was intentional in using co-requisite courses. The flipped course design facilitated this

because it allowed faculty to offer a bit of personalized learning for students to better bring them all up to the same level of understanding.

> "If we have incoming students that are going to really [be] struggling, a lot of the developmental ed practice out there says—especially with math and English—really what students need is *practice*. So they don't need additional curriculum, per say, what they need is the practice, right? And, so, a flipped classroom—a true flipped classroom—allows students to go home, they can practice, and they get immediate feedback right away during class. Professors can see where the disconnect is, and address it."

<div align="right">-Diana</div>

Supplementing the case's classroom design is the intentional manner in which the co-curricular is embedded to drive equity-minded assessment and the overall learning experience. The case—as part of the intentional design of the program—made the classroom and the co-curricular work as complimentary pieces really focused around student needs and promoting student success. Freshmen and sophomore students have coaches available to them. These coaches, which are not forced onto students but are available for all, take the role of a mentor, advocate, and advisor all in one. When explaining the need for these coaches, Diana said:

> "We really spent a lot of time trying to figure out what are things that these students need. We always agreed that we needed a student support arm because these students needed to come in and have some type of an advocate for them when they were on campus. Um, when you're working with first generation students, often times, they don't have a role model. Their parents have never been through or their caregivers have never been through college or the process. So, just, you know, someone to really help them navigate all of the challenges of being a college student.

And so, we said 'okay we really need to have these coaches'. We deliberated for a long

time *what will these coaches do?*' We would say they're traditional college advisor on

steroids. So we said, you know it's not just about them helping them pick classes, but it's

really about them getting to know them as a student, figuring out what their learning path

is going to be, and making them agents in that learning path. Because one of the things

that we were finding as we looked at other schools and programs or initiatives that have

failed to serve first-gen students, lower income students, um, is that they didn't have a

consistent support throughout and students were never able to articulate what they had

learned or what they really wanted to do. And so we found that that was really important;

to have someone outside the classroom reinforce those learning outcomes but also

advocate and help students advocate for themselves."

-Diana

Coaches work alongside faculty to create a holistic web of support for students. When students

are struggling in the classroom, faculty reach out to that student's coach to see if they can

provide additional context regarding why the student may be having a difficult time. Similarly, if

a coach notices that a student is underperforming in one course compared to others, the coach

will contact the faculty member to delve into possible solutions. Together, coaches and faculty

action plan ways to help students develop and advance. The purpose is to eliminate as many

barriers as possible along students' educational journey. As Alberto, a junior in computer

science, shared:

"We have awesome success coaches. For the first two years I had the same coach. It was

really good. At first I was more independent. Like I'll check in when I have to. But now,

like, I wouldn't mind going to her for a random question and do a check-in… I think also

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it's good that they're not forced on you either. You can be with them as little or as much as you want. Like my freshman year I was still in fear about how much I want to communicate with her. So it was strictly academic. If my grades dropped she would check in on me, and we had to do these one-on-ones to schedule classes, see how the [term] is going, and stuff like that. So I kept it academic. And towards the end of sophomore year, like, now I talk to them about everything, like, '*how are my credit hours looking for my graduation?*' To '*have you watched avengers*?' or '*what's going on this weekend with the family?*' Something like that. So, I think it's good to emphasize that you don't have to do that. I could keep it academic and only see them a handful of times per quarter, but I have chosen to talk to them because they're cool…And yea. It helps just having someone one campus. Not just like a friend but someone that's within the institution. It is really helpful. I feel like my experience would be totally different if I didn't have the coaches."

Nico, a sophomore student in human services, added:

"My student success coach is a real nice person. I've never, yea she's really nice. Always on point. If she sees my grade drop below a C, she will immediately email me to let me know '*hey I see this grade*'. So, kind of calling me out on it. Kinda like a second parent. To be like '*so what are we gonna do about this?*' And she'll keep coming to my class and I'll eventually give in and go see her and talk to her about it. And then, that's amazing though that she's so determined to make sure I do what I need to do and make sure I get the grade I need to get."

Interconnecting the co-curricular with the classroom as means to help students succeed was a decision driven by both a focus on increasing the success of diverse learners and combining it with MU's data-driven approach.

"From an assessment perspective we said '*what is a way that we can measure success across a student body?*' We didn't want to measure, you know, not just success in an area like English or success at a grade level like just freshmen. But, really, how can we track their progress through the Degree Qualifications Profile to know that they are meeting these objectives? And, you know, traditional college programs are pretty scattered. The program does what the program does, and often Gen Ed is like an oversight. It's like the stepchild, right? And then it's also like a good scapegoat. So, when students get to their classes and they're not good writers, faculty in those courses can blame Gen Ed—or worse [blame] the student—and say '*oh you know they took all those English comp classes but they're not ready and that's their fault*' right? So we really believe that the best way to approach and support students was to have everything integrated so the student coaching, the general education courses, the major course, and, um, really getting heavy faculty buy in. We said we gotta figure out a way to make all of these things happen *for the students*."

-Diana

Coaches conduct assessment, too, and participate in briefings with faculty over student outcomes data. Aside from course-based assessment, coaches work with the department to have their students fill questionnaires, provide informal feedback on learning opportunities, and—perhaps most importantly—serve as a main avenue through which to uncover student needs that are either going unmet or are on the horizon. The use of both classroom and co-curricular assessment

data helps MU continue to improve internally while also organically meeting calls for external accountability. The motivation for the coaches really is providing students with everything they need to be the best versions of themselves. The majority of coaches were hired from local area high schools. MU wanted to bring in people who were already experts with the student populations they were enrolling. Recognizing that the college counselor support from high school is more personal and intrusive than the traditional higher education advisor, MU's leadership thought high school personnel could help bring their expertise into a new role that was a hybrid between college advisor, mentor, and counselor. In addition, the institution decided to call these personnel 'coaches' because it perfectly embodies their purpose. They are here to help train—mold and develop students into the best versions of themselves—while offering the needed personal supports and motivation. A huge element of what makes the coaching model work is the unique dedication of each person in this role. Most coaches were once in the same shoes of the students they are helping now. This gives them a unique understanding of how to talk to, connect, and engage the students MU enrolls. In addition, the coaches demonstrated an inherent drive for equity work and doing what is best for students above all else. Whether that is advocating for students to faculty and administrators, or making sure students have eaten between class, the tireless work of MU's coaches helps equity-mindedness permeate the curricular and co-curricular. As Carmen, a coach, said:

"Oh they know! [Faculty] know they can't escape me! I will keep coming to them if my students are struggling in their courses, especially if they're doing alright everywhere else. Like, no. Why is this happening? What's going on that you're losing them? You're not going to leave my kids behind. We WILL figure it out, and they know I won't stop."

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This is the kind of internal accountability that motivates and keeps people engaged with equity work on campus. At MU, almost everyone is the 'equity champion', and there is no bigger motivator and driver for equity-minded work than an environment such as this.

The Faculty Role

In order to develop and sustain the equity-minded environment at MU, faculty are strategically engaged and intentionally leveraged to drive the work forward. Making the switch to a flipped classroom design added two responsibilities on faculty which they may not have been too familiar with: taking a step back in the classroom from lecturer to facilitator and embracing equity-mindedness.

> "This shift in pedagogy was alarming [to] some of the faculty that have been here for a while. The practices that we are talking about it, really, at the time— and now it's a lot more commonplace. But at that time to move from standing in the front of the classroom and professing to being, you now, the guy on the side is not a favorable choice. But it comes down to knowing that the best thing we can do for students is to teach them how to think critically and to move forward and work as a team. And eliminating barriers along the way to that. But really, that's what today's workplace is, right? Critical thinking and, you now, working well with diverse others. So, that [approach to pedagogy] was a little different, but while it was a bit of a shock, it really, it wasn't negatively received because faculty understood why they needed to do it."

-Diana

While many faculty were not used to taking a less central role in the course, students were also not used to being the ones leading the course discussion and not having a teacher at the front of the class. Getting to a place where the flipped classroom was seamlessly conducted required

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weekly check-ins with faculty, and a lot of reinforcement for students. To help faculty, the weekly check-ins served to debrief what worked well, areas for improvement, and exploring practices from peers. The check-ins created space for faculty to be vulnerable and feel free from judgement on this new and unfamiliar pedagogical approach. Building comfort with flipped learning for the students also involved some vulnerability. To help breakdown personal walls and empower students to make the classroom experience theirs, some students in their first class saw a video from an administrator sharing their personal and career trajectories; oftentimes touching upon very personal topics. Other faculty encouraged introductory conversations to be meaningful, prompting students to ask deeper questions and report back about what they learned from their peers. The impact of these deeper discussions on day one seemed to encourage students to break down those walls and begin to see the classroom as an intimate and safe space. This built a foundation from which students began to build their agency in their learning process and get comfortable with flipped learning, and also making the burden easier on faculty when it came to acclimating students to the new class design. This faculty role of facilitator of learning as opposed to gatekeeper of knowledge plays really well with assessment. Since assessment is about improving the learning experience, MU's faculty was able to focus on that much more than if they were lecturing.

As Diana shared, faculty buy-in to the switched toward flipped learning was not difficult to get once faculty understood that it is in the students' best interests. This same message helped faculty buy-into assessment. Contrary to West Coast University where equity-minded assessment was driven by student affairs, at MU it is academic affairs administrators and staff along with faculty who drive the work forward. Participants from MU believe that faculty drive assessment.

Since faculty are in the classroom, they have the most contact with students, they facilitate learning, and assessment is ultimately about learning, then faculty are in prime position to assess.

With this in mind, adjunct faculty are actively involved in assessment at MU with similar expectations as for their full-time faculty. The main motivator for this was quite simply the growing number of adjunct faculty at MU. Without adjunct faculty involvement, the data-driven assessment for improvement culture at the institution would not work. More adjunct faculty were hired at MU as a means to better meet students' needs. MU leadership is familiar with the importance of having a more diverse faculty that looks like and is representative of the student body. In addition, MU students themselves had expressed the desire to have more faculty of color. Adjunct faculty were hired to help meet this need. However, to maintain the culture of the case and ensure what they had built could continue to grow, the institution developed an equity hiring rubric that scored potential faculty along their ideals toward concepts such as assessment, familiarity with diverse student populations, use of cultural relevancy, advocacy for equity and diversity, averseness to data, comfort with elements of flipped course design, asset-based approach to teaching, comfort with conversations around race/racism, and other similar elements. The hiring rubric, designed in collaboration with faculty and administrators from both student affairs and academic affairs, wanted to make sure that whoever was hired was a good fit for the case, the culture, and most importantly the students. Heather, an administrator in student affairs, explains the importance of hiring the right faculty:

> "Our faculty that are in charge of hiring do the best they can to ask interview questions
> to get at those mindsets and find a match that supports and believes the philosophy.
> Because our whole philosophy and, like, equity mindset is something that is
> fundamentally difficult to train someone in. You can offer professional development on

pedagogy, how to use technology, assessment, etc, But if a professor fundamentally believes that a student should not bring their whole selves to the classroom, or should be 100% student 100% of the time and not understand that it is only 1 aspect of many in a students' identity even while they are on campus, um, they are not going to be a great fit here. Someone with that perspective is going to undermine everything we stand for and what we've been building. So faculty's experience is important [when hiring], but we look at much more than that because we aren't just trying to fill a position. We are trying to make a difference in our students' lives and we want someone who is committed to that, too.

…We are very unique here and we need to see who will succeed here and help support our mission. And we do a lot of challenging of what a traditional college process or college experience or college student is and asking 'why?' Because it's not good enough to say that we do things just because that's the way it has traditionally been done or how they tend to play [out] in other colleges. Or is it that there is a fundamental reason why that's important? Because that's the way it's been for 20 years isn't good enough. And so I believe it is very important to do that in the hiring and really try to get to know the candidates on a deeper level than the resume."

-Heather

It is important to note that the equity hiring rubric is used to hire full-time faculty and informs the hiring of coaches, as well, not just adjunct faculty.

To help support adjunct faculty and onboard them onto the culture of MU, faculty meetings—such as the periodic assessment data meetings and those aimed at discussing issues related to social justice and cultural relevant pedagogy—are all scheduled at times where adjunct

faculty can actually attend. While this seems like an obvious detail, it not always is at other institutions. Adjunct faculty often have multiple appointments across multiple institutions, so they are only on campus for limited time. Across higher education, adjunct faculty do not receive anywhere near the same supports as full-time faculty in terms of professional development and communication (Anthony et al., 2020; Culver, Young, & Barnhardt, 2020). Thus, while this scheduling detail at MU may seem mundane, it actually is important to mention. Due to their participation in activities with other faculty and being seen as valuable members of the university community, adjunct faculty have largely bought in and embraced the culture at MU. As a direct effect of this, adjuncts have become important drivers for and supports of equity-minded assessment.

Challenges, Opportunities, and Next Steps for MU

In line with the essence of assessment, there are always opportunities for Midwest University to continue to improve. For one, the curriculum needs to adopt the equity and cultural relevancy perspective the rest of the case has embedded.

"One of the things I [would] like to see that I think would be really beneficial for our students is that we don't have any type of, like, ethnic studies programs here or even courses on just like ethnic studies. Or even, you know, nothing on Latinx studies—like I used to have when I was in college. But, again, depends on what college you go to. And I feel like—I mean there's research that shows that those type of courses in, like, having culturally relevant curriculum built into your programs have shown to help students with retention and persistence in graduation. And, so, that's ideally something that I would love to see here eventually."

-Marisol

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Since MU is a Hispanic-Serving Institution and its processes are developed through an equity mindset attuned to the needs of its diverse students, it seems the university would benefit from cultural studies courses and eventually a program. Given that the undergraduate program is still growing, this seems to be a current missed opportunity for the institution but a great opportunity for growth.

Another area of growth is helping students become more aware of the learning outcomes they are expected to reach. While assignments, rubrics, and other assessment tools have the learning outcome they are expected to assess explicitly noted at the top, students are not as aware of what the outcomes are. Students know the university has learning outcomes and they can even name some elements of those outcomes, but students expressed a desire for the institution to do more in this regard. Students see the outcomes and know why they matter, but they want more explicit connections between the outcomes and their future careers. How can students talk about the outcomes to employers for internships and beyond? Students can understand why the outcomes matter for their education and for what MU wants them to know, but deeper connections to the other half of why they're in college (employability) matters to MU students. They want faculty to talk more about the outcomes and not expect students to read them on the syllabus or assignment. It would make a difference, in students' opinions, if faculty and coaches talked more about them and helped make the connections clearer. Students noted that in some classes the outcomes are only reviewed on the first day when going over the syllabus and then again when they are having an issue with a specific outcome or concept. They feel that is too little and too late. Thus, while case participants are actively engaged with aligning learning outcomes and making them explicit/ever present, there is still more work to be done to help students make the connections.

Finally, students also shared that some faculty have not fully bought into the culture. Students noted how faculty who 'are not with the program' stick out and throw things off balance. Instances where faculty use a syllabus that is not their own or clearly from another class was set forth by Alberto. Nico shared an experience with a professor who was not as flexible with the course material even when it was evident some students were falling behind, and other faculty members who were non-responsive to student feedback. These instances are expected, and the students only named a couple instances each—which is encouraging—but it demonstrates how even an institution that is intentional in developing its culture always has work to do in order to maintain it. Also, the fact that these examples threw students for a loop and stood out so clearly shows how once an institution develops a culture and standard of care with students, any change becomes noticeable and can be overwhelming. It then becomes as important to maintain the standard of care as it was to develop it. This demonstrates why it is so important to hire faculty that fit MU's culture and why it is important for already present faculty, staff, and administrators to then help sustain it through data-driven, evidence-based practices that support student success; all with equity-mindedness at the core.

Chapter V:

Tenets for Equity-Minded Assessment Across Cases

Chapter 4 provided an overview of the intricacies surrounding each case and the conditions which made them distinctive. This chapter combines the elements observed across both West Coast University and Midwest University to tell one unifying story regarding the motivations and supports necessary for equity-minded assessment to meet its goals. Four concluding findings that exemplify the core tenets that motivate and support equity-minded assessment are set forth: (1) Grassroots Assessment; (2) Intentional Assessment; (3) Mission Empowered Assessment; and (4) Student-Focused Assessment. These four tenets are the concluding takeaways that together offer a full understanding of the types of practices, policies, and cultures that needed to be developed to instill, motivate, and support equity-minded assessment across these two cases. Direct quotes from the study and references to the literature—as appropriate—accompany a discussion of each tenet to better unpack their meaning, make connections, and situate the discussion within larger conversations. These four tenets include elements of the themes which are distinct to each case and provide broader takeaways for how others can motivate and support equity-minded assessment within their contexts.

For institutions, programs, initiatives, and/or individuals seeking to instill or expand on equity-minded assessment, then elements of these four tenets need to be applied as a collective in ways that make the most sense for the context. For example, if a program already has widespread understanding and dedication to equity, then the takeaways of Grassroots Assessment may not need to be as strong of a focus compared to Intentional Assessment or Mission Empowered Assessment. However, Grassroots Assessment must none-the-less continue to be stressed and ever-present to continue to drive the expansion of equity-minded assessment in other areas of the

program or institution. One cannot ignore one of the four findings in favor of another if equity-minded assessment is to be effectively motivated and appropriately supported. Finally, these tenets are labeled as different types of assessment because separately they represent different assessment perspectives that once together create the appropriate environment for equity-minded assessment to exist and thrive. Equity-minded assessment is a holistic approach; the four tenets come together to complete the whole.

Grassroots Assessment

'Grassroots' is defined as something new that is a fundamental or the foundational source of something (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Grassroots is also conceptualized in terms of personnel: the people who comprise the main membership of a group, organization, or initiative (OUP, n.d.). When applying this to action and practice, Encyclopedia Britannica describes 'grassroots' as movements and initiatives that mobilize individuals with the ability to influence outcomes through small, narrow and localized communications (Bergan, 2016). In line with these definitions, the equity-minded assessment practices observed at West Coast University and Midwest University were grassroots efforts. These cases demonstrated that equity-minded assessment begins, is nurtured by, and grows through grassroots efforts. Members of the campus community who are interested in changing inequitable outcomes for certain student populations are mobilized by this common desire; beginning as a small section of the campus community and slowly growing in support to provide a fundamental ideology guiding assessment. Grassroots movements often are driven to change social issues and challenge the status quo. Similarly, grassroots assessment aims to remedy social issues that permeate the academy—e.g. systemic racism, systems of power/oppression, inequitable outcomes, unequal opportunity, and so on—and manifest in students' learning experiences and subsequent assessment. Grassroots

assessment challenges the status quo of traditional assessment approaches that are common across higher education with equity-minded approaches and practices that address gaps affecting different student populations. It is collaborative, internally-driven work that begins small and grows through a shared purpose, dedication from its participants, and continuous signaling that this work matters.

"With the work of, like, diversity, equity, and inclusion, as a whole, who are the allies? And then you begin to work from there and really add value to the work. So it's about a common equity focus and a common understanding that there's also a lot of benefits in the work. If we look at the fact that you know we're a global economy and it is [the] 21st century but yet—and I'm going to call a spade a spade—we've learned from so many of our races' hegemonic practices that dominance and subversion is real in society and education. Marginalization and the active practice of perpetuating inequality and inequity [are] real. But if we don't work on developing the infrastructures to fix this across all the different levels of [an institution] then I think that we're going to remain where we're at right now… To build support and a head of steam in this work, it's [reliant] on the messaging behind it. Because it, if it would be labeled as 'bringing social justice and equity' or 'to better serve immigrants', you know, it will never pass or be accepted. So we have to find out what will people listen to? What will get them to act? Okay. But at the same time, what is our initial goal and framing it so that it will serve everyone? So it is seen as important to everyone? So, just thinking about us becoming a better Hispanic-Serving Institution, the same applies. We, we want to create allies. We want to bring people that get into, into the works and also make them feel like it belongs to them, as well. That this HSI belongs to everybody. And then I think that, you know, you begin to

really experience some positive momentum; or at least that's been my experience. Start

small, grow, and generate your own momentum."

<div align="right">-Mayra</div>

Equity-minded assessment is grassroots assessment. It starts off small, driven by a few

like-minded individuals, and grows organically to address inequitable outcomes. Similar to most

equity initiatives, it often requires a small group of equity-minded people who are dedicated,

self-motivated, and collaborative. As Tia Brown McNair (2019) says, "to do equity work you

have to live equity work", and that is an intrinsic motivator that determines the success of

grassroots efforts since its success depends on the drive and dedication of those involved. As

Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) posit, the 'equity-minded' portion of equity-minded

assessment is not something that practitioners can step in and out of as it seems convenient:

> "It is a mentality and approach that remains central so that we do not lose sight of it, that
> others are able to follow by example, and we are always being critical, reflective, and
> questioning processes, biases, assumptions, within ourselves, others, and the processes
> followed. This equity-mindedness needs to actively permeate the entire assessment
> process, and the practice of assessment professionals" (p. 13).

Equity-minded assessment at both Midwest University and West Coast University followed this

model by organically building from the ground up through identifying similar equity-minded

peers involved with assessment.

> **"**What usually gets people started in [equity-minded assessment] is '*well, let's look at the
> graduation rate data and break it down a little bit and look if there are any particular
> groups that don't show the same pattern?*' Right? And lo and behold you find that first-
> generation, low-income, um, those groups aren't doing as well when you break

[assessment data] down. Their graduation rates aren't as high. Because people usually start with those high-level institution metrics. So, um, maybe they notice that even by gender the graduation and persistence rates differ. Four year graduation rates you know. Women, um, 50% of women first-time full-time graduate in four years where it's closer to 25% for men graduate in four years. So that's a big gap that might scare someone to act. Right? To ask '*why is that happening?*' Then, in finding answers that person can find other peers interested or looking into the same question. You build a group, then you bring someone else in who might ask a deeper question about race. Someone else asks about Mexican and Puerto Rican students or Filipino students. It gets deeper, right? Until you move beyond those high-level questions and measures and into [deeper] questions on specific outcomes and competencies. But it's a slow process, especially if not supported and led by individuals. If it's not a department or institution saying this matters, but two or three people trying to coalition build and swim against the current."

-Fernando

Without a common core of equity-minded individuals intrinsically motivated to address inequities, equity-minded assessment cannot succeed.

"We are rebuilding the plane while flying it without trying to harm anyone. I love that analogy. That, to me, that's the essence of living equity; of living social justice; of doing assessment from an equity stance. And it shows the immediacy and importance of this work. It's a new initiative, this is, so we're building the plane. That is exactly what we're doing. But our students are already on their way, right? They're already here and if we don't do this right and in time, then they can be harmed. Inequities are harming them. So we need people that understand this urgency, that are dedicated to this immediate issue,

and are willing to go the extra mile to ensure we don't do harm…And know that if we do this well, we can potentially influence the success of students who are identified as 'at opportunity'.

<div align="right">-Emma</div>

This type of work cannot be forced on people who do not feel a sincere motivation to do equity work. The reason being that equity initiatives are already dealing with populations of students who are not receiving a fair return on their education. They are already likely operating at the margins of the institution, and any misstep that widens those gaps can be exponentially harmful. Any initiative that is not implemented well can do significant damage by setting entire groups of students further behind or setting them up to fail altogether. Someone who is not equity-minded can accidentally ignore inequities by not exploring them thoroughly, they can be unmotivated to dig deeper into data and go beyond just doing the bare minimum.

> "I feel like, if you're equity-minded or equity-driven, then what gets you to implement it should or doesn't even need to be an initiative specifically aimed at equity. Because so much of it—what it means to be an effective person committed to equity—is in your day-to-day actions in your regular work. It's how you go out of your way to include people. It's how you make decisions. It's how you, like, engage and talk to people. I think that's how you demonstrate that you value [equity] and have a commitment to equity. It's not through a structured thing. It's not because someone said to do it. And it's not just doing what they said, either. It's by going beyond and exploring that which isn't yet explored because it might make a difference for students not getting a fair return or a fair outcome."

<div align="right">-Beth</div>

Equity-mindedness is the foundation. Living equity work—a real dedication to implementing an equity lens across all efforts and being driven to remedy inequities—is almost a requirement for equity-minded assessment.

> "Back in the day, I was asked to look into some of those student success indicators. You know, like retention, persistence, graduation, and you know, what I did? I was like '*what if we look at the data by disaggregated groups?*' Looking at first-gen and non-first-gen, by ethnicity or underrepresented students, gender, and then I was like '*oh yeah! Commuters too versus resident students!*' And the data, just looking at those indicators for, uh, those groups we saw how there were huge achievement gaps; and gaps pertaining to retention and graduation. Okay? So, we wanted to look at why was this happening. But further, we wanted to do something about it. We didn't just want to have the data, we wanted to fix it. So I took it around, and tried to get folks to come into this with me, and what really did it was the, you know, cross-sectionalizing and looking at, uh, commuters particularly who are low-income and first-generation, and it turns out that, you know, they are, 95% Latinx having problems. So it took someone—me—with an equity lens, with that innate equity curiosity to get my hands on this data and dive in. Because it was happening for a while. The data showed it clear as day. But nobody made the comparisons. And then this work really took off when I found other [equity]-minded individuals to, to, to really come in and take it to the next step. Because it's hard work. This was a side project, you understand? Nobody was getting paid to do this, it was not a part of their responsibilities. It was a passion, you know, a passion project for the initial group. So it could have lived or died based on their dedication to this equity work, and I

am grateful it lived. But thanks to these people involved who came in with me and brought in their resources and their time and their dedication to this work."

<div align="right">-Fernando</div>

An important element of grassroots efforts is collaboration. Equity-minded assessment at West Coast University and Midwest University brought a wide range of individuals together. By pooling expertise, perspectives, and resources, equity-minded assessment effectively leveraged collaboration to broaden advocacy and advance work that can create change for the benefit of students experiencing inequitable outcomes: in these cases those students were commuter students who were also predominantly Latinx. While having an intrinsic drive for equity work is an important motivator for equity-minded assessment, collaboration is an important support due to initiative fatigue, resource constraints, and limits to personal experience/expertise. Participants from both West Coast University and Midwest University made their resource constraints known, along with the fact that faculty, staff, and administrators all wear multiple hats and suffer from initiative fatigue.

"I feel people here wear like 2 and ½ hats. I mean the joke I made around the holidays was we should just get everyone an extra hat rack for their holiday gift because we could all use it right? So there's plenty of time-strapped people, and it can be a serious tension for new initiatives across the campus. But a good way to overcome that is letting people see right off the bat they will be part of a team. It won't be just them trying to figure this out while also doing their actual job responsibilities."

<div align="right">-George</div>

"That's a real challenge here, initiative fatigue. I'm sure it is across higher education, for sure, but here I can say it's definitely real. But it's our own doing. Because if we press

the restart button on everybody's good idea every ten minutes we, then, don't have any anchoring to ask people to jump into a new idea. They'll just think it won't last and will have wasted their time when they could have done something else that could've been more impactful or more worth it. That 'what if' you know? The opportunity cost then becomes too great for people to commit if it's not regarded as a worth-while project or under resourced where it becomes a huge time commitment for, like, two people when it realistically needs five to ten, right?"

-Joselin

Collaboration is an important way of keeping initiatives full of steam so their success is not dependent on one person and their availability, energy-levels, or workload. Many participants also lauded the benefit of being able to rely on other's expertise and experience to help create interventions, design culturally responsive approaches, ask the right questions, explore data, etc.

"A lot of the time, higher ed faculty don't really get a ton of opportunity to use data to learn from each other and kick off, like, training on instructional practices. You know? As faculty, you become an expert on your content area, but that really doesn't really necessarily translate into knowing how to create an engaged three hour classroom experience for students and then properly assess it. Even less, like, how do you assess it equitably, right? And, so, I think that's one of the ways our content meetings are really important because it allows all the instructors teaching the same course to bring and spotlight their own strategies and their own resources that they're using so that [they're] learning from each other. It's a way to see the data have a real, regular impact. More so when we see that one or two faculty are, like, really struggling with, like, Black students. Like, they're falling behind for a *while*, right? But this faculty is doing great. Well, let's

use those great practices to *all* learn from them. Give faculty a chance to ask their peers

questions that will help them, and, like, think tank solutions. Because we all see based on

data or other practices that it needs to change, right? So then we look into research or

outlining a strategy or whatever it may be. It allows us to really look into constantly

improving toward approaches that will help students succeed. And data facilitates that

process because it's not an opinion but reflection of facts."

-Jessica

This perspective aligns with the literature. As Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) state when

speaking about analyzing data to identify and find ways to address inequities: "This takes

practice, patience, and thrives from collaborating with and learning from others who have

different experiences, skills, and perspectives than our own" (p. 12). Equity-minded assessment

encourages this type of collaboration throughout the assessment process.

Regardless of who leads equity-minded assessment whether it is academic affairs—as is

the case in Midwest University—or student affairs—as is the case with West Coast University—

these collaborations emphasized equal participation of diverse perspectives since everyone is

working toward a common goal. The collaboration broke through established silos in higher

education that work to segment work across institutions. Both cases proved that a holistic

assessment approach is needed; one that takes into account assessment data from both the

curricular and co-curricular.

"We meet each week and look at the data. We use the data to discuss, like, okay '*these*

students are doing well here. But this isn't working in my class so how are you getting

them turn in this work. What are something that might be affecting this drastic change in

submission rates or participation or you name it'. So we have that kind of discussion all

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the time with not just faculty but also with the coaches and advisors. And, so we look at the student holistically. We use holistic data from the classroom and co-curricular and even from other areas like the career-center and those things. And that data, we analyze it and talk about it and really tear it apart about what it shows about the student, about us, and we deploy interventions that all of the faculty and the coaches that are working with the students can use moving forward."

-Diana

"That's one of the things I think of that our model is being very unique when we think of holistic. It's not just that we're talking to students about all those things but we're also partnering with the staff and faculty in each department to execute a workshop or intervention or event that, like, ultimately leads to success of the student. On top of talking to the student about it, as well, right? Students have to be aware and engaged. But, yeah, it's all encompassing. The data from one helps add to the picture painted by another and vice-versa. I think that's neat and unique. I think assessment data tends to typically stay in one area and not across, let alone used to create joint efforts."

-Carmen

"Something that's naturally evolved but we're targeting more this year to be more articulate and intentional about, is the partnership between academic and student affairs. We have student success meetings where faculty, coaches, and advisors participate. So, both academic and student affairs are invited, right. But then we also make sure that one member of each side of the house are co-leading the meeting with their diverse perspectives but from the same goal in mind: the goal is student success. One person approaching it from the academic side one person from the student context and co-

curricular. Together approaching it from the holistic side. So everything that can be brought into the conversation about student success is invited in, right. And because we are heavily focused on assessment, we continue to improve those meetings and incorporate feedback from faculty and staff on the format and what's useful, if a conversation should be expanded, all that."

<div align="right">-James</div>

"You have to leverage a lot when you're doing assessment for equity. Like you have to leverage a lot of collective effort. You have to leverage a lot of collective time. There really has to be the group kind of collaboration in this and that's only going to exist if people have that foundation of 'this is what we're doing. There can't be any question of 'what we're doing' because I think the other difference—and again the piece of advice— and part of the reason why I see it's working here is truly the collaboration across departments, between the staff and advisors and faculty. Again, that's another one because they truly, collectively know the students. Like, you have to know the students if you're hoping to address inequality and inequities. And the students bring their entire selves the class and the institution. And, so, faculty are going to know this piece. Advisors are going to know this piece. You may have counselor who're gonna know that piece. But students bring their entire selves to the institution and assessment has to capture that. I'd say you really have to put in systems in place and processes that really can understand and then serve that entire student."

<div align="right">-Frank</div>

Again, the fundamental driver fueling this collaboration is an intrinsic passion for equity work. This commitment to equity is what helped equity-minded assessment grow through

collaboration and thrive in these cases since it helped combat initiative fatigue. There is a sense of duty and urgency when doing equity-minded assessment that helped keep faculty, staff, and admins engaged regardless of other responsibilities. New assessment data offered the opportunity to ask new equity questions. As the data grew the depth of analyses also grew. Students and their needs were constantly changing, too, so the questions and what the work looked like kept changing. These changing variables kept everyone on their toes and did not allow initiatives to feel stagnant. On the contrary, it kept equity-minded assessment expanding and the results served as a vehicle to organically continue to grow and recruit more faculty, staff, and administrators.

> "There's always something to look at. The more data we get the more questions we can answer. The deeper we can get to the root of the problem and coming up with ways to close equity gaps. So, of course I find this worth-while and actually look forward to it when I get an update or have a meeting."
>
> -Luke

> "I probably shouldn't say this but I am glad to be a part of this. So, give me more work! It means what we're doing is working and there are new ways to help our students if this is growing in responsibility, right? So, yeah, I mean, I have a ton of work, but bring it on. It's worth it even if we just close one gap for one group of students. And that puzzle changes each academic year, sometimes from term to term, so yeah. It's certainly not boring and feels innovative even if the way we do it is mostly the same, right? The data might not be."
>
> -Martha

> "This drives me. I can't speak for anyone else, right, but this stuff gets me excited. I get to combine assessment with equity and student affairs and all these things that, you know,

I think are cool and important, while also getting to ask questions and be nosey? Yeah, I love it. Let's do more of it. And I think I'm not the only one. Lots of people are feeling optimistic and proud of this work, so it's easy to pull others into it. I know lots of people here kind of wish they were more directly involved."

-JayDee

The equity-mindedness actually helped increase faculty and staff buy-in with assessment. An important issue with assessment has been garnering buy-in, especially from faculty (Banta, 2002;). However, in these cases the equity lens helped garner more buy-in with faculty and staff (i.e., Midwest University) and staff and administrators (i.e., West Coast University). Assessment itself can benefit from an equity perspective, not just the student populations experiencing inequitable outcomes. Equity-mindedness can be a useful approach to help different stakeholders see the value of using assessment data, how their work can help bolster available assessment data for uncovering inequities, and how they can implement evidence-based changes to fix inequities. Similarly, for those already entrenched in an assessment for improvement culture, it seemed fairly easy to get them on board with the idea of using assessment to also explore and remedy inequities. The following exchange from an interview with Martha and Karen helps exemplify this.

Martha: "I work [in the same department as] Emma, and she knows that anytime there's large datasets I want to play. So, she brought me in. I kind of came as an outsider. I am learning all this stuff about what they're doing, um, and now looking at the data and trying to see like okay, what are the measures they're interested in, who are the students they're working with? Can we see if there's difference? Can we see if there's growth? Um, all that stuff. So I'm the data nerd! But I did initially struggle with that lens the team

uses to explore data."

Karen: "I've been at the university [a long time] and I know our student data inside out. Plus I have a critical view of data. I really do understand its limitations and embedded biases. And I bring that equity lens to analyses. So I help give that perspective to Martha and to the rest of the team when they ask us a data question and ask us to see if there's any difference between a, b, and c on outcomes x, y, and z. Right? So I help prepare the data for Martha, and help Martha with analyses to make sure we are being critical and bringing that equity-lens."

Martha: "It's curious, like, curious because I never thought of looking at data in that way. I had done some of it when asked to, but I never thought to do it as standard operating procedure. Like, where that's just expected. And then have the freedom to, um, to think deeper about it, right? I was always the data person, the assessment and measurement person, but now I can also start to say I am the equity person because the lens they use in this project has actually helped me in other projects for other departments. Again, I know, like, I don't fully have it there yet because they still ask questions that seem obvious but still surprise me, but I know I am making progress because a light goes off and I start going in a little deeper."

Karen: "Yeah! Now she calls me with ideas when before it was mostly me doing that. And really pushing the boundaries of our data to help get students on equal standing. Like what happens if we control this for this population that also has this experience or this need? It's just fun especially because you know it will have an effect on those students. They're not just variables. It's real life things they're dealing with that we are trying to get at."

Equity-minded assessment is a grassroots effort. It takes dedicated individuals willing to dedicate themselves to the work. It takes collaboration and leveraging the expertise and drive of peers to support and move the work forward. While 'assessment' and 'equity' can be contentious concepts in higher education, these cases demonstrate how equity-mindedness can be an important lever through which to gather buy-in with assessment and vice-versa since someone's disposition towards assessment for improvement can help garner buy in for equity-mindedness. Increasing buy-in for this work is an important lever to growth and sustainability. The next theme elaborates on this by exploring how equity-minded assessment thrives and scaffolds when it is intentionally done within a culture of assessment for improvement.

Intentional Assessment

In philosophy, intentionality is thought of as the mental ability to stand for something and act; to link one's inner consciousness, preferences, and perceptions with appropriate action relative to a desired purpose (Jacob, 2019). Intentionality is a central element of human action that leads people to execute with purpose (Bonet, 2020) to achieve the task at hand (Schultz, 1953). However, the purpose or task at hand is highly contextualized and can lead to a constant shift in attention regarding what is more relevant (Schultz, 1953). Intentionality fits well with equity-minded assessment since it requires assessment practitioners to stand for something: equity. The purpose at hand is to close equity gaps through assessment, but since inequities can change through interventions and new incoming data, the task at hand also should continuously change to close equity gaps in other areas as they become relevant. The important aspect is that the equity-minded assessment must be done intentionally to improve teaching and learning and actively working to address inequities. When done with intentionality, equity-minded assessment can become second nature—an effortless process that fits within campus activities and is not

seen as added work.

"One of the things that I, that I, find really interesting talking to new people we bring into this thing is, you know, they may not come right out and acknowledge where we are from an equity perspective in terms of the nature of the work because—sorry let me say where I'm going with this because I've been at institutions that were not Hispanic-serving but yet really had this deliberate emphasis on equity. And so the way in which you go about it [there] you disaggregate your data, you take a look at your populations, and then you plan about how it fits with where you're going.

But what this institution did is it just frontloaded who we're serving to make equity a super intentional focus. We brought those students in and, and by the nature of our demographics—of our student and their success outcomes—we've been embedded in equity work from day one. No forceful mandate. Just doing it. Because people knew one by one that it was something we needed to do. But people don't feel necessarily that it's happening because it wasn't the usual, you know, forced message being told from the top to disaggregate our data or take a look at these different populations. No, we're automatically doing equity work here just by being intentional of serving who's coming in.

And, and I think sometimes there's a gap that some of our staff don't really—they can't really speak to that intentionality because they're used to that other system right? That system that's usually predominantly white where you need to be told to disaggregate your data, to talk about those different populations and how they're doing. And they go '*why are we not doing that here?*' and we certainly do disaggregate but, like I said, just our student demographics alone in taking a look at our outcomes and the support services that

we put in place, I mean it's embedded completely in our work. Nobody has to be told

anymore. But, you know, again it's all [about] how people are [going to] frame and notice

it. Sometimes people have to be told to do something to acknowledge it's happening, but

is that really authentic?"

-Frank

In both cases, the speed in which equity-minded assessment grew from a grassroots effort

to a standard operating procedure was largely dependent on the intentionality of the case

participants and in establishing an assessment culture of improvement. First, both West Coast

University and Midwest University needed to have good assessment practices in place before

equity-mindedness could be embedded. This study regards the assessment process described by

Kuh et al., (2015a)—i.e. assessing for improvement instead of assessing for accountability—as

good assessment practice. Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) also explain that equity-minded

assessment is reliant upon an assessment culture of improvement. It is the equity-mindedness

which is then embedded into such a process, which means equity-minded assessment cannot

truly be implemented until a culture of assessment for improvement is established. This holds

true for both cases. At WCU, they knew their interventions needed to be assessed in order to

evaluate the effectiveness of the overall case and garner more support from the institution.

However, they also wanted to be able to use assessment data beyond grades to tell a more

complete story of student experiences and be able to make more informed decisions about how

to improve.

"We've been collecting a lot of data. A lot. And so now we want to ask ourselves 'what

kind of data are we collecting?' Right? Because before it was we need data to do these

analyses, but now that we're making changes the nature of the data needs to change. As

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student change that data needs to reflect them...For commuters students their experience is different than those that live on campus. We know that through data. And it's only for the fact that they don't have the opportunities to connect and, so, what does that even mean to get connected to here? You know? Sense of belonging and those kind of things are obviously important to us and they extend beyond GPA. They feed into GPA and persistence and eventually graduation, but they aren't what you typically look at in assessment…So with that data, the question is, well, we're looking at the curriculum of the seminar to see is the curriculum is creating the necessary opportunities for those students to increase their sense of belonging, for example. And that's what we're doing now in trying to make sure that a lot of those things that we are measuring are actually aligning with those opportunities and experiences we want students to gain…But you know it takes a lot to—it takes a village. It takes a lot of collaboration too, across the campus. In particular in the student area, the curriculum development side of it, the student affairs side. Because these aren't things that we're measuring that happen in isolation. It's not just the classroom where these gains are made. It's not just there where student will also demonstrate what they need from us. It takes data and interventions and supports from this whole place. Different folks and different departments. Because students don't just stay in one single place when they enroll in college, right? They don't just stay in one classroom forever. So it's a pretty good collaboration—a *needed* collaboration—that we have here. And we've come a long way."

-Fernando

Following this train of thought, WCU created the assessment process described in Chapter 4 (p. 124) to make use of a more holistic assessment process that could inform ways to improve how

they serve commuter students through evidence-based changes. This was the first intentional decision WCU had to make. Once they settled on what they would assess, what types of data they would receive, and realized how they would use assessment data to improve, they made the next intentional decision: embedding equity-mindedness in the assessment process. Midwest University is a little unique since the program was intentional from the beginning. As described in Chapter 4 (p. 158), MU intentionally designed its program to be informed by good assessment practice and utilize equitable approaches.

Regardless, both cases strongly relied on intentional assessment for improvement. They saw the relationship between equity-mindedness and making their evidence-based improvements much more impactful for students experiencing inequitable outcomes. MU and WCU decided to stand for equity and used assessment as the tool to work towards attaining it; knowing very well that how those inequities look and for whom can and will change. Their intentional approach to pursue inequities and uncover solutions through assessment data was a significant propellant for this work, as well.

> "There's a lot of things you can look at from an equity point of view in assessment. But you have to start there [with asking] what are the gaps that are occurring? And, why? Then extend it to other areas. To other learning experiences. For example, when they have the conversations about High-Impact Practices. So, we have study abroad, internships, student faculty research, and all these good things. And we start looking at that data and we find consistency with what Kuh says and the [National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)] and all this other stuff say that, you know, yeah, High-Impact Practices do have a positive relationship with retention and graduation, especially the more HIPs they partake in. So, that's good.

But then, we have to ask the next question: 'who's participating in those?' Right? Well, we start looking at that and we're finding out that students who tend to participate in HIPs tend to be female, white, and live on campus their first year. It's quite the opposite of what we're finding with our commuter student population and Latinx. You know? So, that kind of made us go 'okay, so how do we get these students coming in as freshmen and sophomores—the commuter students who tend to be more students of color, tend to be students who are first-generation, low-income—start participating in HIPs?' And we quickly realize we have our work cut out for us, but we have to pursue it because it can help our students.

…I think the next challenge for us is—how do we make it more sustainable? How do we expand it to other student populations not participating who are not commuters? How do we assess these opportunities too, because participation is not an adequate assessment for the outcomes, right?...Equity gets conversations going, and then it takes intentionality to then extend beyond—we have to be purposeful to use that information in ways that matter, right? Just having the data isn't enough, and we have to make appropriate connections."

-Fernando

Intentionality and the acceptance that equity work is an ever-changing task-at-hand helps equity-minded assessment thrive at these institutions. The questions that participants develop to interrogate the data and explore ways to improve offerings helped to keep them engaged. It helped to maintain excitement about finding the problem and moving towards finding the answer to the problem. Perhaps it also speaks to the inquisitive nature of those involved in these cases, but there's no denying that equity-minded assessment seems to thrive in data-driven, evidence-

based cultures of assessment. Case participants were driven by the questions they could answer through assessment data. They were continuously invigorated by the changing challenge of finding outcomes gaps, making changes, uncovering what works to close those gaps, improving what did not work, and doing it all over again. These participants understand that just because a gap is closed, it does not mean the work is over. There are other areas that need improvement and since students change from year to year the gaps that were once closed need to be revisited.

While equity-minded assessment seems to thrive in places with a data-driven, evidence-based culture of assessment, Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) offer the reminder that institutions first need to get to a point where they have the appropriate data to engage in meaningful equity work. For example, disaggregation is often referenced as an equity-minded assessment practice. But Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) vehemently state that surface level disaggregation is not enough to make an assessment process 'equity-minded'. Disaggregation needs to be meaningfully and intentionally done (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020).

> "We have data on everything. And so they're weekly producing reports for the faculty and staff for students which are reviewed in weekly meetings. [At the end of each term] they're producing stats on persistence and retention for the students, breaking it down by class and section and connecting it to the demographic information of the students. And so it's all connected and welcomed disaggregation. But, for me, while those big success metrics are useful, one of the things I kept saying is '*where's the student success data where's the student learning outcome data?*' But um, that was the thing that they then are working to produce at the end of the year and so it will be interesting to see moving forward how they balance that high-level and more granular data.
> So, if you do take a step back, you know, it's the kind of thing I talk with our vice-

provost about. 'Cus he'll check me a bit on like, I'll say '*oh there's still so much we could be doing!*' to which he'll say '*listen, I've been at institutions that will put out tons of disaggregated data and will be able to display their story as if they're very serving of students but then we you're actually there when you're in the community, it doesn't actually feel that way*.' And you know, while they have kind of the storefront it's actually really empty [inside]. They don't actually do anything with the disaggregated data. So what's the point? Whereas we're almost the opposite of we're not necessarily across the entire university doing the best of disaggregating our data and we're certainly not showing it publicly…but we're meeting those students' needs, right? We're being intentional in making sure that how we look at data helps us see those gaps. That we put that data to use and make changes. And in our mission and everybody's operating from this lens of how can we help, and how can we increase access, and how can we help students succeed regardless of what their situation is."

-JayDee

Getting to the point where deep, meaningful disaggregation can occur requires intentionality on three fronts. First, there needs to be purpose in the types of assessment data collected to allow for meaningful disaggregation to occur. Second, meaningful disaggregation requires purposeful exploration by asking questions that can help reveal inequities. Third, this requires intentional use of disaggregated data to improve the disparate outcomes afflicting specific groups of students. As mentioned before, intentionality requires action. The short-term action is following-through and analyzing data through an equity lens. The lasting action is using those data to then address inequities; to do something about what was uncovered in the data by also using data to inform changes.

On top of helping equity-minded assessment take off at WCU and MU, Intentional Assessment is also helping equity-minded assessment and its impacts grow and branch out. These cases exemplify what Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) dispel: that equity-minded assessment does not mean assessment is only used to address inequities or only for the betterment of students of color.

> "So, what our [equity-minded assessment] and work with commuter students is also doing, is it's providing us an approach and framework that the residential people are now going '*oo we don't really do this or that or the other. How can we do that, too?! How can we look into that, too?!*' And that's a real opportunity that [Kevin] was initially focused on, too, that we need to broaden this conversation for other student populations. Naturally the place to start is non-commuters or residential students, right? So, ironically by shooting for equity in one group we're recognizing opportunities. Because, look, what is often times causing [inequities] relates to socioeconomic, privilege, how these two interact to create preparedness privilege, and so on. This is not personal, it's not my view. This is experiential drawing from the entire state and then students are self-selecting who wants to come here, but we think we can import some of those opportunities from this initiative which may ironically change the equity gaps in the other group who for our intents and purposes is the group we are trying to compare to. This is always, always with the continual improvement. And to me it's all about continuous improvement even if we're focused on only a subset. Always looking about keeping focus on our subset, but searching [for]opportunities to broaden impacts and application because otherwise we're not doing our jobs. The inequities don't end with just our Latinx commuter students."
>
> -George

This scaffolding where the impacts of equity-minded assessment permeate other initiatives and help improve the success of all learners is both a goal of equity-minded assessment (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017) and a result that directly helps to deepen the campus support for such an approach.

Another way equity-minded assessment is scaffolding itself and its impacts through these cases is by the way the data-driven and evidence-based culture is leveraged. An important element of equity-minded assessment is transparency (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020). Both WCU and MU expressed a commitment to transparency, but are doing a better job with internal sharing of assessment information than they are with making assessment data externally available. Faculty, staff, and administrators in the larger institution context are able to see assessment data, interrogate the data, and make connections to other initiatives.

"We give assessment reports to faculty and coaches, and we try to as best we can, to help present it in ways that's helpful for them and with messaging that gets them to think about action items. But I think faculty and coaches struggle with the, um, idea that data is about the past. Right? So data is just the past. It is not the future. It can help to influence the future, though. It can help to make positive change. It can also explain some of the negative change that will result in positive change or improvement moving forward. But, um, sometimes I'm hearing faculty who were getting stuck—and coaches who were getting stuck, as well—like '*the data has shown every week that this student is not gonna show up, so he's not gonna show up next week and I don't really know what to do about that*' and, so, we've had to also flip that switch a little bit. Take that thinking of, if you immediately assume that because it's happened for two weeks or two terms or whatever that its the only option, [then] you don't have a growth mindset. So, instead, let's think of

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actions we can take to fix that. To make sure it doesn't become the future. To really drive

action and get away from those pitfalls. But it all begins with giving them the data..."

<div align="right">-Diana</div>

Students receive insights into their outcomes performance so they can have a real-time

understanding of their preparation, can have greater agency in their education by knowing what

needs improvement, and can have language at their disposal to use when speaking to potential

employers.

"Now, to take the impact of this work a step further we said '*Okay, now we're gathering
all this data and the students are seeing it, but how do we really articulate it in a way
that's digestible to students and can also result in action?*' So we said let's build
competency reports. So we ran competency reports last year. Then we did a Summit on
them in the summer to improve them, too. But the competency report is designed to read
like a gas meter. Your student gas tank. How far along are you in getting to 100% or full
on different competencies or outcomes? Of the times you are to be assessed on this
competency, how have you done and how many more assessments can you expect? Well
if you're a student and see you're only halfway there, then you can expect to be assessed
a lot more on this competency in the next two years. But you see that you're performing
really low—your average is 2.5 when you're looking in grading scale—you can see this is
an area where you can take action to improve. I could share the competency report with a
student and say 'moving forward, problem solving is an area you've really struggled
with. So, when you go into your next classes look at the rubrics and see if there is a lot of
problem solving in there and take the time to really think about how you're problem-

solving in every assignment. But I want to see that 0.5% uptick in your problem-solving skills this year.' So also using to set goals, again, lead to action."

-Diana

This internal transparency with assessment data helps scaffold equity-minded assessment practices by faculty and students seeing the direct impacts of this approach and what it means to them. It has served to validate equity-mindedness as a worthwhile and meaningful approach to assessment at both institutions. Montenegro & Jankowski (2017; 2020) claim that institutions need to find a way to let equity-minded assessment practices get their foot in the door; to find an appropriate place for equity-minded assessment to take hold in their context and be seen as valuable. Once the campus community saw how the quality of assessment data allowed faculty and administrators to answer deeper questions about student learning it then helped to support additional equity-minded practices. For example, they began exploring deeper and more meaningful opportunities for student involvement in assessment through focus groups and getting students to verify learning outcomes statements. For these cases that are already deeply rooted in equity-minded work, this 'foot in the door' technique has served to scaffold practices outside of the case context.

"I think data can get people's attention. Like when data clearly shows disparities that others thought did not exist or weren't a problem. I think one thing to be mindful of when using assessment data is that data is seen as power. Who has the data is seen as the source of power and so making the data obvious and out there for everybody to see and feel a part of can be impactful for gaining support. I often use it to get people to see it's not just me thinking this is a problem or this needs to be improved, or whatever. But it's the data. The data says this! And, so, I find that to be a good way to start conversations, especially

with faculty."

-James

Where once a faculty member was disconnected from this practice, they now saw value.

Intentional Assessment has helped equity-minded assessment thrive and scaffold at both West Coast University and Midwest University. However, these practices also need to be sustainable if they are to have long-term impacts. Too often equity initiatives depend on one person being 'the equity person', and they tend to fade once that person leaves.

"Our administrative turnover has been a huge challenge. Whenever you thought an initiative is going to work, the person leading it would leave. Because they come, they start their diversity or equity project, its gaining steam, and then they leave. And it doesn't survive without them because it was theirs. They lead it and didn't really incubate it where others were given the chance to have a stake in its success. So, that turnover has jaded folks. Before things stabilized and our new leadership came in with a clear and strong DEI vision, equity was left to the equity champions. Sad but true. Now, everyone is empowered and involved where if we had another persistent admin exodus or a revolving door, it wouldn't matter because the culture is now cemented. The majority of initiatives would continue, which if you've been here as long as me is amazing."

-Cindy

Building equity-minded assessment through grassroots efforts helps make more people 'the equity person', but connecting this grassroots effort with a culture of intentional improvement can help make deeper connections regarding why this work is important. Everyone can see the impacts it is having on pedagogy, learning, and closing equity gaps. It no longer becomes a siloed passion project, but an intentional, actionable, equity-minded approach for improving

student outcomes. The next theme addresses this very concern by exploring how these cases connected equity-minded assessment to larger institutional missions and goals for sustainability.

Mission Empowered Assessment

This study finds that equity-minded assessment is best supported through a Mission Empowered Assessment approach. Both Midwest University and West Coast University demonstrate how aligning equity-minded assessment to the larger overall mission helps to support this practice. Further, they demonstrate the importance of institutional leaders actively speaking about this work to signal its importance. This last point regarding administrators' messaging is central to this theme. Mission Empowered Assessment does not just require for equity-minded assessment to be seen as being 'in accordance with' the mission, but leadership must also actively work to empower it: to make sure it is seen as needed for and endorsed by the mission. An institution or program mission is an overarching message that signals the goals and values of the institution; that which everyone who is a member of the campus community is striving to achieve. When equity-minded assessment is seen as useful means to achieve the mission and those in leadership positions frequently connect equity-mindedness to larger goals, then it signals to everyone across the campus that this work matters. Mission Empowered Assessment helps increase the visibility of equity-minded assessment and creates a supportive foundation for this work to be regarded as an expectation as opposed to 'someone else's job'.

Assessment is ultimately driven by faculty since the majority of direct evidence of student learning comes from the course-level. However, this study demonstrates that equity-minded assessment also requires strong support from campus leaders; both directly and indirectly. It is important to keep in mind that 'requires strong support from' does not necessarily mean 'it must be led by' where administrators and leaders dictate exactly what needs to be done.

"I would say that when we started it was very much siloed. It was '*I'm collecting data over here' and I don't even know if they were collecting data in academic affairs because I don't know what they were looking at*'. And then when we had, uh, we had a Vice President who did a really good job of bringing different groups together and, ah, saying '*don't just work in your office reach out to someone else, bring a varied group [of] campus [folks] together*'. Really pushing on the strength of varied perspectives. And leadership ended up bringing both academic and student affairs into a committee to build outcomes for the institution and other departments that really got to elements of interest for both sides of the house. That really started to break down the separation especially with assessment because now we were both speaking a similar language; the similar understanding and baseline of the learning outcomes. And now, with our leadership and really pushing on the value of diversity, and the importance of inclusion, and fighting for equity, yeah, that has made this work seem much more important. And it made it a logical next step for us in the committee and in this program to say '*Hey! Why don't we look at our outcomes and see how we can support that?!*'"

-Fernando

"This may seem strange to say, but while it is supported and to an extent led by those at the top, where they say this matters and this helps us achieve xyz, right? But leaders also have to ensure that everybody has a voice at the table. A sense of ownership. It's not [enough] just to have one person do the talking because they have rank, and everybody else does the work. Everybody needs to be able to say what's on their mind. Everybody's perspective needs to be placed on the table. It can't just be people coming together to get work done under someone else's directive. Everybody has to be able to share their

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thoughts and have stake in it."

<div align="right">-JayDee</div>

"And I also would say administrators and campus leaders should welcome and expect some rub. Especially if they are in a two tower approach [between academic and student affairs] that when they come together that there's going to be rub. They need to expect it and be able to just work through it and know that the people behind it are good people and you'll find ways to work through whatever the challenge is. But while the towers exist, the right messaging can build a bridge, you see? And I think that that can be challenging, uh, for us, because we have completely different expectations between student and academic affairs. And we talked about this before that the, the expectation of the executive leadership in student affairs is the number counting and um it isn't necessarily what's best for good assessment. And getting them to understand that has been challenging, but how we've talked about this initiative has helped. The support from our leadership has helped. And both towers have come together on this because of it."

<div align="right">-Kevin</div>

When doing equity work, one must be comfortable with change. The nature of the work is dependent on the changing student populations, changing curriculum, and evolving pedagogical approaches; as evidenced in the disaggregation conversations aforementioned in the chapter. As the 'task at hand' concept discussed when speaking about intentionality, things change and the focus of the work should change with it. As such, administrators have to allow equity-minded assessment work to be flexible. Faculty and staff must be given the freedom to try new things and learn from mistakes. Institutional leadership must support through messaging

used when speaking about equity-mindedness and assessment, and through the direct supports provided to those actively doing the work.

"And that's key—especially at a complex institution—the communication; and also transcending this thing of '*oh our students are currently not being served well in this way and that reflects poorly on me so we're going to try to like [makes motion of sweeping dirt under papers] HEY LOOK OVER HERE!*' Hide it right? And that doesn't help anybody, you know? It's really not helping anyone. So we have to, we have to change that culture to: so there's an opportunity here, there's an expectation, you are valuable to our institution, we value what you're doing and we value what you tried to do. Even if it didn't work, we value the efforts you made. But if your intent was 'this' but 'that' is what's happening, we also need you to think, like, how can we rethink or how can you rethink the approach? Don't give up! Try it again! And, again, these are cultural things that start from the top and that messaging. If, you know, if after the third time it is not working, then let's be honest, you have to start thinking about resource reallocation. And that doesn't mean getting rid of that person, it means thinking about '*what would be meaningful to you if we wanted to change this initiative?*' But we've fallen into a little bit of a trap of people have become their programs I think. And that's a resource thing in some cases. 'Cus, like, people become afraid, right? Like '*oh no don't take my money away!*' That fear causes people to be skittish about being called out for mistakes. To not share or show their assessment data. But if leadership says it's okay to fail and allows people to learn from the mistakes and improve, then it changes the fear."

-George

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An important element of administrative support that helps empower equity-minded assessment is providing adequate professional development opportunities and resources for faculty, staff, and administrators. As Montenegro & Jankowski (2020) note, professional development is an important support for equity-minded assessment since it gives practitioners the necessary tools to do this work well. It can be difficult to implement an equity-minded lens if one does not necessarily know what that means in different situations or how to do it. Equity conversations also require conversations around race/racism, power/oppression, social justice, agency, and so on. Many of these conversations can be uncomfortable for faculty and staff to have, let alone to lead and address in a classroom setting (Kernhan, 2019; Diangelo, 2018). However, these are important tools and understanding that those doing equity-minded work must have. Professional development opportunities at MU and WCU focused on cultural relevancy: what this means for assessment practice, pedagogy, and student learning.

"So we've got like a cultural relevant pedagogy self-assessment that we give to faculty and staff to see if they feel like they're using culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom or in their everyday work. So, we pass that out and based on that we prepare and offer professional development every year. We focus on the areas faculty and staff showed some challenge with, while also trying to reinforce those good areas a little bit. Then, we pass that self-assessment out again after PD's to see if there's any type of growth in the practices that they are using.

-Marisol

"We try to train—I mean a lot of our teachers come in with this understanding that students are ready at differing levels and they come into our classrooms all [at] different levels—and that we have to then adapt our teaching and assessment. But we train faculty

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and staff to have this kind of approach. Like, you know, just making sure that [they're] doing the best for each individual student, but I think that we have a curriculum that kind of allows for it, too. I mean, it's a very culturally relevant curriculum, right? And it allows for them to tie in or tap into things in their lives that will kind of benefit their education and what they're understanding in a way that they wouldn't necessarily get in a traditional model per se. But to make sure it's done well, we have to train faculty on it. Offer training on what it looks like for pedagogy. What it looks like for assessment. The benefits for students and learning. Questions to consider and reflecting on ourselves. That sort of thing."

<div align="right">-Beth</div>

A common issue with professional development is selection bias. Those that are attending them are—for the most part—already predisposed to have an equity-lens. The volunteer nature of professional development makes it difficult to reach a large portion of the campus community. To overcome this WCU instilled elements of equity-mindedness into all assessment-based professional development offerings on campus. While this starts as being done intentionally by the facilitator, the administration's messaging helped her feel emboldened to make it more central elements of each professional development offering and then create separate stand-alone equity-minded assessment professional development opportunities. At MU, professional development became more of an expectation due to the large number of offerings and how leadership spoke about the need to be able to do this work well. Professional development became so prevalent and valued as a resource to these campus communities, that it almost becomes more difficult to avoid professional development on equity-mindedness and assessment than it was to receive it. It speaks to the leadership and vision of these cases—the

intentional approach to making sure members of the campus community could do this work well—that professional development opportunities were richly so available.

> "I feel like there's professional development everywhere here. One of our coaches just did a DEI training for faculty and adjuncts. And then I did one for them presenting on Yosso's cultural community wealth and how that is represented and how that shows up in the classroom setting. And so I've never been a teacher, but I feel like there's a lot of mutual respect around DEI topics here and a feeling that, like, we feel like everyone brings expertise. And through PD we really tap in each other. And, again, I would say that it is a constant practice and it is a constant like '*how do we call people into these conversations*' on a regular basis when we see inequitable decision being made. And that is something I just live and strive for to do daily in my practice and something that I think we as a team really strive to do in [our] practice at all times."

-Carmen

Equity-minded assessment is best when it's supported through campus leaders openly signaling that the work matters. The case study institutions did this is by aligning it to larger institutional goals so it is not seen as a stand-alone effort. This is directly in tune with what Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) state about equity-minded assessment, and what assessment leaders generally recommend (Kinzie, Hutchings & Jankowski, 2015; Jankowski & Marshall, 2017). Using elements of the institutional mission to enforce equity-minded assessment's important role within the institution and how it can help the institution meet its goals is critically important. This does not mean that leaders have to explicitly say 'equity-minded assessment is an expectation' or 'equity-minded assessment can help us do xyz'. Instead, at institutions that already have a strong culture of assessment for improvement, the defining element became how

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leadership spoke about equity, diversity, and race/racism; and then relayed it to the importance of addressing inequities to meet larger institutional goals. This intentionality in how leadership spoke about equity empowered faculty and staff to embed equity-mindedness into their practice and promote it to peers.

> "I'm a big fan of this work should not be—we can't fall into erratic rhetoric of permanent accusation…which is only looking for what you're not doing well. Right? So I was really trying to campaign and say we should be celebrating where students are really achieving and using that to sort of lift up the campus to show, you know, to honor our students and also use it for development purposes right? And the same for faculty. Celebrate their accomplishments both big and small. And then, where we're seeing something that maybe isn't working, then let's not hide that and feel shame. Definitely do not ignore it, right. But let's identify where we have an opportunity. So it's a classic administrator '*we don't have a problem we have an opportunity*', right? But we also have an obligation, right? So, if for faculty or someone what motivates them is not messaging around 'this is an opportunity to improve'—there's those who don't really like opportunities—then I would shift into more of the 'we have an obligation to our students' kind of message."

> - George

Campus leaders often used still unmet elements of the campus mission as launching points and bullhorns for the need to embed equity within institutional practices. For example, both WCU and MU are Hispanic-Serving Institutions, but participants from both institutions mentioned how they are now beginning to make the turn from being 'Hispanic enrolling' toward being more 'Hispanic serving'. This was largely due to how institutional leaders spoke about equity, diversity, and the need to be inclusive. This intentional language from leaders empowered

equity-minded assessment forward by making it imperative to the campus mission. It highlighted a need that was unmet and empowered actors within the campus community to address it. Faculty and staff saw it as their responsibility, which led to an uptick in attendance at professional development opportunities and collaboration on equity-minded assessment approaches.

> "So over 150 professors from all different units came to the last professional development we had, and, so it was very positive. So that was the first kickoff PD we had on equity and assessment, and, so, I wanted it to start off positive and see who are the allies that we can count on. We were able to explore implicit bias, microaggressions, cultural responsiveness, disaggregation, and pedagogy. It was really involved. Lot's of takeaways for practice and the classroom. We have others scheduled that are almost full, too, the one on equitable hiring and implicit bias in hiring has been very popular, too. But, the interesting thing is we've been doing this for a long time and we have really seen an uptick on sign-ups and people showing up for equity, diversity, and inclusion PD opportunities. Really, the uptick came when our president came and really started doubling down on how the university will commit to equity and diversity. It's been a really strong and consistent message from [the president]. It's been refreshing to me, because I've seen it as important, but now I think with her saying this it makes it seem important to others, too. Does that make sense? Like, it doubled our average attendance. Usually I have to weave DEI lessons into other PD's because I want to make sure those who attend them have that in the back of their minds or at least a few tools. But now, I am able to reach people just on DEI focused trainings."

-Caroline

Missions are duties everyone can see themselves having a responsibility in achieving regardless of role in the institution, department, or program (Campbell & Yeung, 1991; Kezar & Kinzie, 2006; Davis et al., 2007). Advancing equity-minded assessment from a mission standpoint also allows the message to change from one of assessment or one of equity—which can be polarizing topics—towards a conversation everyone in higher education can contribute to: student success.

> "I've told George many times, I have found virtually every way to talk about assessment without using the word 'assessment'. I, I have every euphemism you can think of. Um, and, you know, in a lot of ways I think that has worked. And I mean, by starting with faculty's desire to understand whether their students are learning, and to think about, um, all the pieces of assessment in the context of learning and good teaching, um, if I focus on that aspect of it I think faculty get on board very quickly. Um, avoiding the term 'assessment' until we have a common understanding that what we are really talking about is learning, it is student success, it is our institution mission. A lot of faculty still see student learning outcomes as something that they know they're supposed to have on the syllabus but they don't really understand why. Like they know what they are right? But they don't understand what is the value in crafting good student learning outcomes and making them visible? So, that's a conversation I have learned to have with faculty from a '*this is good for your students*' perspective. It has been very interesting to try to bring faculty along in that thinking, especially, um, when they have, sort of, almost a gut reaction to the terms 'student learning outcomes'. So we just talk about learning and student success instead."

-Caroline

Changing the terms of the conversation toward student success can also help people to clearly see how equity-minded assessment aligns to shared goals and the mission of the institution. This, in turn, helps to support and drive the work forward.

Getting everyone on the same page and speaking a language that is understood by all can also help to maintain the assessment culture over time; making the impacts of this work sustainable. Professional development and using mission empowered messaging to talk about equity-minded assessment helps mitigate against this being someone's pet project or the 'initiative of the month' that goes away as quickly as it came. By ensuring people understand how central addressing equity issues are to achieving the mission of the institution/program, it also reinforces this will not go away soon. It will be sustainable over time since it begins to embed it within the culture; within the established ways of doing things.

For both cases, an important element of embedding equity-minded assessment into the culture and norms of the case was through hiring. For one, leadership speaking about the importance of equity made departments look in the mirror. It drove calls to increase faculty, staff, and administrator diversity to be more representative of the student population. However, they were intentional about ensuring new hires were not just experts in their roles or subject matter, but that they also demonstrated values similar to those expressed by the leadership; values that resonate with and strengthen those of the institution and program.

> "I don't want someone to have that mindset of x, y, and z, and say '*if the student doesn't respond well to my x, y, and z, then there clearly must be something wrong with the student*'. Right? And so I think that that's a similar mindset we want to build in faculty as well and make sure we're bringing in faculty that share that same affirmative outlook as our culture here.

Hiring is always an exhausting process because it's always like picking your mate. You don't want to pick wrong! So, it does take a lot of extra time, but it's time well spent if you hire the right people. We don't want to hire someone that turns out to be like '*oh, you do this for students?! That is not what I signed up for! It's not what I believe*!' And, luckily we haven't had that experience yet, or had to deal with hiring someone who turned out to not be a good fit for the position. But it's part of the normal vetting process right? With faculty you are, you tend to hire more people and you're also hiring people that are very specific for content area and have very specific degrees and qualifications so that makes a small pool even smaller, right? But really, qualifications are not as strict. Like, we have preferences but requirements are less. We look at prior work experience more than degrees because of the nature of the work. We look at culture fit. We look at experience students like our own. An alignment of philosophy balanced with what they themselves bring to the table. The degree and where they came from is not the end all be all right? You could come from an elite institution with this huge record, but if you don't fit you don't fit."

-Heather

This is similar to the Grassroots Assessment theme where those doing equity-minded work approached others with similar ideologies and goals to help get the work started and help it grow. By hiring people who showed an affinity for and experience with equity-mindedness and use of assessment for improvement, these cases helped sustain and grow their cultures. They did not simply hire a new professional that can help benefit the institution; they also hired an advocate. Through professional development they can then merge the new hires' equity

perspective to apply it to assessment. However, when someone lacks an affinity for equity work, this characteristic can be hard to instill.

> "It is harder to train someone to implement an equity perspective to their work than it is to show someone how to design a good syllabus or to compile data on student achievement on an outcome throughout the year. Like, I can give you tangible processes to follow so you can do some work, but I feel like equity requires a bit more than just, like, a check-list, right? It's contextual, its instinctive, and it requires dedication to done right. It is almost like changing someone's internal motivation and what gets them excited. If equity isn't it, then that will take time to instill."

> -Sofia

> "Getting my faculty to talk about equity and assessment as a singular conversation has been easier here because that's the culture. It just makes sense here. If you're looking to use data, and data helps you improve, right, like everyone has that baseline understanding, then they naturally get it that this helpful process can and should also be used to close equity gaps. To make this place more inclusive. To improve for students who we might not be doing a good job at supporting. And I don't even have to whisper that last part because we're always looking to be better and not hide from it. But, yeah, I mean, it wasn't this easy at other places where the assessment conversation happen, like, once every ten tears when we're up for review.

> -Beth

Leadership has a significant impact on how quickly the work advances and is seen as meaningful; not just within the case but to the campus overall. As alluded to in this theme, a useful element leaders used to support equity-minded assessment was speaking the common

language of student success. In fact, by focusing their efforts largely around student needs, these cases helped build and advance the equity-minded assessment practices in place today. The next theme discusses how Student-Focused Assessment is a crucial element for motivating and supporting equity-minded assessment in higher education.

Student-Focused Assessment

You cannot have equity-minded assessment without also having Student-Focused Assessment. Montenegro and Jankowski (2017) echo this sentiment when describing a culturally responsive assessment approach, and push this further by saying assessment cannot just be considerate of students but must take steps to involve students as active participants throughout the assessment process. This study finds that a student-focused approach is the largest motivator, support, scalability, and sustainability factor of equity-minded assessment. All of the equity-minded assessment approaches explored in this study revolve around a deep rooted interest in doing what is best for students. Working to uncover where there are barriers that are impeding students from succeeding. Taking some of the pressure and responsibility away from students to navigate the hidden curriculum, and instead giving them the tools they need upfront. Putting in the necessary research and time to understand what it actually is that students need, their expectations, and their strengths in order to create learning opportunities that put them on a path towards success. Leveraging already existing roads and building new ones that allow diverse students to give their input and participate in assessment as much as possible. With this student-focused perspective it becomes second nature to use assessment data to look deeper, do more with data, and start implementing equity-minded practices without labeling them as such or realizing that is what is actually happening. It takes the labels of assessment and equity and

makes them immaterial because the focus is on doing everything possible to ensure students succeed.

An intentional student focus helps foster buy-in and common purpose. It is easier to grow and scale equity-minded assessment when having conversations about learning or student success—elements which academic personnel can easily identify with in their daily responsibilities—instead of talking directly about assessment. This was true for both cases and focusing conversations around 'what do our students need and what do we need to do for our students' became a common motivator and driver for equity-minded assessment. Everything was approached from the perspective of increasing student success and knowing the institution is not fulfilling this goal unless all students succeed. This meant there could not be an equity gap left unturned, but they first needed an avenue through which to uncover these gaps; especially those that were not already evident. Assessment was the means to do this, and employing an equity-minded approach to assessment was the natural avenue to get there. By using assessment data to uncover inequities and then making evidence-based changes that addressed those inequities, equity-minded assessment found itself at the core of MU's and WCU's activities.

A central element of Student-Focused Assessment is using data to eliminate barriers students face, increase student agency, and repeating it over and over again. Student outcomes are affected by elements which may at first seem outside the scope of learning outcomes assessment. But the student-focused approach required by equity-minded assessment deems it necessary to look at student needs holistically beyond their educational preparation; and acting accordingly to eliminate any barrier that may exist. Eliminating barriers does not mean making things easy for students. It does not mean that quality and rigor will decrease. It just means that when student learning is assessed it will actually be assessing what students know and can do

instead of their ability to navigate the hidden curriculum, their food insecurity, their familial responsibilities, their employment demands, their lack of resources, and so on.

"So, finding what students need really needs dedication and different types of info. The assessment data did not tell us our young mothers were struggling because we don't capture who has children in our data, right? But our coaches talking to students found this cohort was struggling and it reflected on their academic [performance]. And so, then asking them what they need—and we're also starting on a much smaller scale but then we're going to scale it up—[informed] our support for young mothers. So, then, we had to look into who do we put in charge of that? Because you need the right person, right? Well, one of our coaches actually went to college and had a child when she was in college and she, like, very much believes in providing support for those students. So she's had a couple info sessions and brought in a community provider [that gives low-cost childcare and services to low-income families]. She facilitated a partnership between us, she's built social activities and things to get away from the stigma of being like a college going mother and instead really honor and celebrate the life that you have in your family and then like find that this place is supportive and welcoming to that environment."

-Carmen

"One of the most important things we do here is make sure our students have had something to eat. Not even joking. We found that a lot of our students struggle with food insecurity. And because of the block scheduling and where we are located, a lot of students can't go home to eat and also can't afford to eat around here. So, they go from morning until evening without eating. That is insane. Who can learn when, you know, in an empty stomach? So, we have a food pantry we re-stock weekly. It's open while classes

are ongoing. Students take what they need as often as they need. No need for permission, or, like, no need to check-in. Just grab and go. We have microwaves and refrigerators in the student rec, and yeah, just taking that barrier away because why not? Our students need it. They never asked for it, we had to get that from different stitched up data sources first and then using our coaches and staff to test it out and do a bit more digging to not make anyone feel ashamed because they really shouldn't feel that. But now our students find it really helpful and they make recommendations of what to add. We change it up every so often. And yeah, like, it's an added expense, another responsibility, but I think the benefit we get by putting students in a better place to do well is much more valuable right? So, yeah, slowly chipping away at barriers…"

-Sofia

Student-Focused Assessment means having a fundamental understanding that students do not exist in a bubble when they are in college. One cannot separate students' lived experiences and needs from their standing as a student. Students are adult individuals with real needs and real responsibilities of which education is only one. Going deeper to try and understand why outcomes might be disproportionately spread amongst students by different characteristics involves making an effort to understand what barriers different student populations face that contributes to those disparate outcomes. It does not involve putting the blame on students with comments such as 'they don't care' or 'they are disengaged'. Deficit thinking about student capabilities and belonging works to reproduce inequities and environments that afflict certain populations. Relatedly, having the perspective that the institution is exceptional and, as such, only exceptionally underprepared students will fail breeds contempt toward students.

"I mean it really gets back to that whole concept of 'exceptionalism', you know? Um, it's

really easy to fall into this trap if you're at an institution of, you know, your graduation rates and retention rates are sky-high where they keep going up and keep going up. Then it [becomes] really easy to say, '*well, we must be doing something right. I don't know what it is yet, why that is, but we don't need to worry about it because if it ain't broke don't fix it!*' So, great that you're doing well as an institution, but that exceptionalism can also create a culture of ignoring gaps that aren't causing trouble. It can lead to contempt, too, you know, against students. Students of color. First-generation students. Students who need more supports. Any student who might be giving the institution '*trouble*' because they bring down those performance metrics. So instead of seeing it, like, '*we're great, but how can we be better?*' Or even just '*how can we be great for all students?*' I think there's the chance that exceptionalism leads people to blame students. They fail because they are unprepared or uninterested or not good students. Instead of asking 'why are we failing those students' or 'what role are we playing in those students not graduating?'"

-Fernando

Instead, a student-focused approach requires approaching assessment from the perspective that the institution or program can always do better for students and it is the duty of everyone to find ways to improve. This approach served these cases to strive toward holistic understanding and wrap around supports to promote the success of diverse learners; especially those facing inequitable outcomes.

Equity-minded assessment involves looking beyond the typical high-level measures of success used by colleges and universities—e.g. persistence, retention, and graduation rates. Maintaining a focus on students motivated MU and WCU to look at what lies beneath the surface

and drives those results. What else contributes to students attaining the desired learning outcomes? What is not being taken into account that may go beyond those cognitive outcomes? What is the relationship between non-cognitive outcomes and learning for different student populations?

"There's a lot that goes into graduating students in four years—and that's the directive we were given [as an institution]. Four years. We have to influence cumulative GPA, we have to influence persistence, we have to influence student motivators, and hopefully those together will influence time-to-degree… So we dove into the data and the only thing that significantly predicted graduation for *our* [commuter] students were leadership, psychological well-being, and metacognitive awareness. And these are not the outcomes the rest of the institution measures, right. These are non-cognitive outcomes, but, again, we have to look at things that influence and feed into those measures—your GPA and persistence. The things that are below the surface, right?

Graduation, GPA, persistence are all surface level. They are easy to see and get data for. But we are focusing on the non-cognitive. We're focusing on, not leadership this year, but psychological well-being and metacognitive awareness is where we're putting a lot of, of, focus on the redesign for [the seminar course] this fall. And not leadership because uh, we only have 14 hours! We actually saw a significant need for psychological well-being—a decline really from last year—in our students, so we said we need to have a focus on that. So leadership is out for Fall. But that's assessment, right? You have to choose which outcomes for each assessment. Can't do them all even if we want to. What makes me feel better is we are integrating this trauma informed classroom model, too. That's our intention, to center sense of belonging and center reverence for the trauma

that these students are experiencing because they are. Honestly. And, we assume it's in the room, and train our instructors to meet it. Not *fix* it. But *meet* it. With compassion and self-compassion practices.

…So what we're still going to do is center sense of belonging in the co-creation of the classroom with students. Across sections students are working toward a common project that's semester long and, you know, increase level of awareness through more embedded reflective practices into the week and then redesign the class based on student performance data and those reflections and feedback. We've really upped the reflective learning practices—the cultivation of reflective learning practices—aimed at cultural wealth, upped uh, stress regulation, emotion regulation. Again, non-cognitive values that none-the-less impact and feed GPA and graduation, right? And then we also centered sense of belonging. And we said '*let's co-create with students a container for sense of belonging*!' Which then requires us to, um, have that peer check-in with instructors and, ah, the design team to check-in and, and adapt the course in real-time Because if you are co-designing you better be responsive!"

<div align="right">-Emma</div>

Looking beneath the surface to understand and address those additional factors that impact student learning and their ability to demonstrate what they know and can do effectively and efficiently is important for remedying inequities. However, it takes an intentional approach to be able to gather the necessary data to explore those non-cognitive outcomes and map how they relate to the course, program, and institution outcomes. By having a Student-Centered Assessment approach, it became an obvious step for these cases to delve into non-cognitive

factors with the understanding that those have to be brought up to par, as well, if institutions are

to achieve equitable outcomes across student populations.

This student-focused theme also caused MU and WCU to take stock of their actual

student populations—continuously. As Montenegro and Jankowski (2017; 2020) recommend,

institutions need to take active steps to understand who their students are each year. This

included understanding their needs, aspirations, and strengths in order to make appropriate

changes to student supports and pedagogy as appropriate.

"I think it's probably an over reliance on e pluribus unum style of approach in higher

education. It's that thinking of 'out of many there's one'. There's one [institution], there's

one student body. But it's not that simple, right? I think it's [different] based on where

your, uh, the section of town that you're coming from. If you're out-of-state or in-state. I

think it makes a difference on what high school you went [to]. Your socioeconomic

status. Your cultural background. Your social identity. And certainly your skin color. All

of those things play a role in their college experience. In their learning.

And, and sometimes we have to be more specific than others in looking at these things.

So, for a student who is a local student, who is from a low socioeconomic background, or

who is from a border community, what's needed for them is much different than a student

who's coming from New Jersey to school here and has the economic means to pay the

out-of-state tuition to live on campus for two years and maybe even get involved with the

fraternity or sorority. Their means, their needs, and their experiences are completely

different, but they still have an [institution] experience. And I want whatever their

experience is to be meaningful wherever they're coming from. And that's where the

student focus and the equity focus helps to, like, keep those things in mind and try to

understand those different needs now rather than later. And understand how those differences come together to affect the whole—the institution experience and those measures of student success we fetishize."

<div align="right">-Kevin</div>

A few participants stated that a focus on students almost requires inherent flexibility with services outside of the classroom and flexibility with pedagogy inside of the classroom. However, it is up to the individual to exercise that flexibility, which is where having a shared focus on students and being in tune with student needs is important because it increases the chances that faculty, staff, and administrators will be flexible and pivot as necessary to help students in real-time.

> "One of the things the students told us is that they need more 'just in time'. They need to be able to benefit from the assessments. From the feedback they give. And, again, thinking as a faculty member having to do this, my first thought is this is really hard, right? But living equity is really hard. But that's not an excuse because imagine how hard it is to be a student living through inequity. My discomfort or, you know, preference to not do that should be meaningless. It needs to be done, and best if done in ways that, um, small changes can happen in [real-time]. And, you know, big changes can come later, but we need to have avenues to also make those small, timely fixes."

<div align="right">-Emma</div>

> "One thing we like to rely on is co-creating the seminar with students. It changes based on their feedback because we want it to be as useful and applicable for them as possible. So, yeah, we have our instructional curricular designer faculty helping us, but we also treat students as experts in their needs. Like, one example, when we had a career session

and [students] were, the feedback was, in essence, like '*this is stressing me out even more*' or '*the timing isn't quite right*' and '*I would've liked to know this*'. So, we moved that out until we figure it out a little better, and instead moved in more task management and stress management. More looping on that and stretch some of these evidence-based learning strategies, right? Because that' what [students'] feedback says they need. It what our assessment say they need, too…We also found that their anxiety was going up from the beginning of the seminar to the post-test. So we had to ask questions about if it went up because of the timing of the post-test, did we prime students for it? And we're asking student about that, too, so that we can change the timing or if it's something else we can build that in. So, that's, you know, form an equity standpoint is sort of that macro scale. The daily changes and flexibility. The semester to semester changes. We are just now, actually, also starting to have that conversation [at the larger institution], which is way overdue, but great. I've been able to share some of our program successes and practices in that regard."

-George

"One of my students who is now the vice president of the social justice club had a confrontation [in public transportation] the day after Trump was elected where—and she is Black—and they said to her '*you won't be around much longer now that Trump's president*'. I can't even tell you what was going through my mind when she shared that. These students were immediately experiencing the ramifications of the election and so there were a lot of tears in that class that day. There was a lot of fear. A lot of confusion. A lot '*we don't know what to do*'. Some students were immigrants, you know, we have undocumented students who were like '*are we going to get deported*' and they were

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genuinely afraid of all these things. So, I tossed out my lesson plan. There was no way

that was happening! Nobody was going to absorb anything. Nobody. Instead, we started

talking about, like, ways to sway those fears. Think about how to be safe. Ways to be

informed. But, then people started saying like '*I want to be involved and do something*'.

'*We need to do something.*' And the social justice club was born from that, but, like, yeah

we just had an open session to get ideas out, get feelings out, help them reassure

themselves, and that kind of thing. We took the full class period. And I added a few

readings to the syllabus to help them, I changed a few lessons. But that's what they

needed. I could've stuck to my guns and still had them go through the lesson, but that

wouldn't have been right. I think any faculty would have done that after seeing the look

in their eyes. I'm sure many did."

-Beth

While this study largely dealt with cases aimed at serving commuter students who were

predominantly Latinx, the case institutions understood that these populations are neither

monolithic nor the only ones needing help. As such, they did not treat the commuter population

as one in the same. They did not treat Latinx students as one in the same. They also did not

devote equity-minded assessment to only improving outcomes for Latinx commuter students.

Instead, MU and WCU went as far as their assessment data permitted in extending analyses and

enacting interventions for all populations as needed. They also expressed a desire to go deeper in

how they use assessment data to better understand students, and do more meaningful

disaggregation. As Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) state, the ability to do in-depth data

analysis and meaningful disaggregation does not happen over-night. It takes intentionality to get

there and be able to be as impactful with assessment data as possible. However, maintaining

focus on students when it comes to assessment is helping them get to that point by seeing the potential benefits of such analyses.

Through centering students and their success in the assessment process, these cases were able to offer students more agency in the assessment process—and by association greater agency in their learning. Student-centered assessment naturally promotes practices that leverage the student voice. Montenegro and Jankowski (2017; 2020) recommend embedding students' perspectives in each step of the assessment process. While the institutions participating in this study did not engage students directly as active participants at every step, they were intentional in having the student perspective present and were actively seeking more ways to get students involved.

"For us that was why we build the rubrics that way and we even simplified the competencies from there. You'll see when you look at the master rubric written differently than the actual simplified competencies. That was written in student language. We wrote the competencies, shared it with students and asked 'What does this mean to you?' And we then revised language again so that we could be sure they understand and see that every time they're being assessed. And that was really intentional for us in that way."

-Diana

"So, for example, we want to revise the curriculum based on the outcomes assessment we did here. We want to change it for next year because one of the feedback from the students is: this is a credit no credit one unit a week, and they want to build community. I mean, we can't get them to stop talking, right? Which is great for engagement, but we're also trying to cover content. And [the seminar] doesn't really count towards their

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graduation. So that the value proposition, if you will, is—and we asked them this—
would you be interested if [the seminar] were three unit that fulfills a [general education
requirement]? And they were like '*absolutely!*' But not just '*absolutely!*' they were like
'*we also want this and this*'. And, so, we now have that proposal for next Fall if it's
approved. So our students are directly influencing what we do and how we do it, right?
Not just through our formal assessment but through the informal feedback and those
types of opportunities. It allows us to create deeper connections. More meaningful
connections for them."

-George

These efforts are noticed by students, as well.

"Like, [instructors], um, they listen and, like, go out of their ways to make sure we are
able to, like, that we have what we need to do good. And not just in the class, either.
Like, I remember a few of us as a side conversation made a comment about a, it was, like
this [issue we had with like the city], right?...And [the instructor] stayed after [class] to,
like, troubleshoot you know? And the next class she spent a few minutes, like, talking
through it with the entire class 'cus others might be having that problem, too and stuff. So
little things like that. But, like, I don't know. It just feels like I'm valuable here. Like I've
had the instructors follow up with me on stuff I share on reflections and [feedback]. It
was weird at first, you know? Like maybe I don't want to stick out like that. But it's
actually cool. It helps."

-Luis

"I don't think I can name all six competencies, but, uh, specifically with assignments
there's a connection. I for sure can say that in every course introduction, like that first

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day, we touch on about how the whole course will connect to one of those competencies. But, uh, maybe not so specifically as I would like. Which is, kind of, like, telling us this class can help you towards degree development but not beyond that. It helps when we see the reports and stuff, though, 'cus you can connect it better."

<div align="right">-Beto</div>

"I know for one thing in my freshman year when we were going over some civic engagement professional skills and all of that, my teacher would have a little in-between in the year, or even in the month sometimes with all of us students where she would just talk about what we feel like about the class. Like, whatever we would like to share. She would then take all that info and actually use it forward to make the class better. And everyone in that class, that I know of, has gotten good grades. And it's not like its easy either, but I think, like, due to the teacher listening, giving us feedback, just, uh, being— what's it called—like responsive. And then making sure we're making sure what she's saying and why she's teaching us make sense to us. Those check-ins were great 'cus sometimes I was lost. I won't even lie. And she went back and clarified it for me. So that was really helpful for me and my classmates… Yeah, other classes have it a little here and there, for sure, but that teacher was, like, super on top of it so she sticks out."

<div align="right">-Nico</div>

Student-centered assessment recognizes and places value on the student voice. It makes those involved with assessment work hard to erase or overcome assumptions about assessment and student capabilities—similar to those Montenegro and Jankowski noted (2017; 2020)— toward advancing practices that are beneficial to students. Increasing student agency in practices that affect their learning—especially for students of color (Devos & Torres, 2007)—can go a

long way toward ensuring the success of diverse learners. An important element of this, as noted when talking about transparency, is making sure students can also make use of assessment data. One important element of increasing student agency in assessment is involving the student voice, and the second is giving students the ability to learn from assessment data so they have the opportunity to then act and improve themselves based on that data.

This Student-Focused Assessment approach seems to be the hidden driver amongst all other themes, as well serving as an important motivator across them. Grassroots assessment began because case participants identified and were driven to meet student needs. The 'action' element of intentionality is often motivated by people's desire to impact real change that helps students succeed. Institution leaders continuously used a student-focused language, and even pointed out that student success is intrinsically tied to the mission of the institution. Maintaining a focus on students helped to motivate a more holistic form of assessment that built bridges across the institutions as academic and student affairs collaborated openly to create holistic supports for students. It enabled the institutions to see the viability in and need for leveraging assessment data to improve teaching and learning so that students experiencing inequitable outcomes get a fairer return on their education. Student-Centered Assessment is at the heart of equity-minded assessment, not just in practice as Montenegro and Jankowski share (2017; 2020), but also as a motivator and important support for this work.

Conclusion

In the end, what the findings of this study all boil down to is a more holistic approach to assessment. The findings of this study speak to a process that needs to be mindful of students—to place them at the center of assessment—while creating the necessary culture and environment to motivate and empower individuals to use assessment data to find and close equity gaps.

Equity-minded assessment moves beyond the classroom and involves the co-curricular to have a full understanding of the inequities affecting students and the available solutions—even those which may not be captured by data such as students' food insecurity but none-the-less impact learning outcomes. Those hoping to instill equity-minded assessment must ensure they create the appropriate avenues within their programs/institutions to allow such a practice to thrive and be impactful. Faculty, staff, and administrators all play important roles: in creating grassroots efforts for equity to be instilled in assessment, for assessment to be intentionally used to improve and close equity gaps, to empower individuals who do assessment to gather and use data to uncover and address inequities, and for students to feel the benefits of such an equity-minded assessment process. All of these four tenets need to be embedded. The extent to which one is given more or less attention depends on the context where equity-minded assessment is occurring; but these cases exemplify that all four tenets must be present in order to give equity-minded assessment a chance to thrive and be done well.

This study offers a deeper understanding regarding the motivators and supports for equity-minded assessment in post-secondary education, and what this practice can look like in regards to student involvement. This study sought to understand why faculty, administrators and staff conduct equity-minded assessment. What motivates them and gets them engaged in this work? Two themes spoke directly to this end: Mission Empowered and Student Centered Assessment. This study also sought to understand how equity can become a central element of assessment. In other words, what supports equity-mindedness in assessment? Three teams directly speak to the supports equity-minded assessment needs in order to thrive at institutions: Intentional Assessment, Mission Empowered Assessment, and Student-Centered Assessment. Finally, this study sought to understand the role undergraduate students—especially those

experiencing inequitable outcomes—should have in assessment. This understanding is built across all themes. For example, student involvement requires slow growth—similar to the Grassroots Assessment theme—in its own right. Institutions cannot expect to add student involvement across the entire assessment process right from the beginning. It requires planning and growth over time to continue to explore the best methods and most appropriate means through which to get students involved. Student involvement should also be intentional, empowered by leaders, and reliant on a student-centered approach that sees their involvement as invaluable. In short, these themes build an understanding that students should be the inspiration for, active participants in, and consumers of assessment.

This study helps inform a significant gap in the literature by building understanding on the types of motivators and supports needed to implement successful equity-minded assessment practices. Current literature focuses on establishing a need for equity-minded assessment (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017; Heiser, Prince, & Levy, 2017), what equity-minded assessment should look like (Montenegro & Jankowski; 2020), and the types of practices that this work involves (Dorimé-Williams, 2018). However, prior to this study, there was little understanding on the motivators that drive institutions to get involved in equity-minded assessment, the environments that help equity-minded assessment take hold and grow, and the supports that equity-minded assessment needs from institutions in order to be impactful and sustainable. This study helps fill in the gaps so that this approach to assessment can be implemented well. By recognizing the environments—i.e. the motivating factors and supports—equity-minded assessment needs, institutions and programs can seeking to implement these practices can work on creating the necessary conditions to really help this assessment approach thrive and be impactful.

This study also provides further practical understanding regarding the concept of equity-mindedness and how to grow it to move beyond an individual/organizational element towards a procedural/practical approach. Bensimon introduced the concept of equity-mindedness and expanded upon it with the USC Center for Urban Education's twelve equity-minded indicators (n.d.) to supplement their equity scorecard (Center for Urban Education, n.d.). The equity-minded indicators rate how mindful individuals and the institutional culture seem to be to equity issues. This study helps expand the application of equity-mindedness into a practice directly related to student learning and working to close equity gaps.

Finally, this study was conducted before the COVID-19 global pandemic took hold. As a result, the effects the pandemic has had on campus inequities and campus responses to those inequities are not reflected in the data, analysis, and themes. However, it is important to note the importance of this research given the bright spotlight the pandemic has placed on the inequities affecting students; especially students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds who tend to disproportionately be students of color. The shift to remote learning has raised awareness to the digital divide (Wieck, 2020), accessibility (Hamraie, 2020), created unforeseen student needs and barriers (Weissman, 2020), and also changed the way assessment of student learning occurs across college campuses (Jankowski, 2020). Given these conditions, it has become imperative to put equity-minded assessment practices into effect and create the necessary environment that helps this approach to assessment thrive and be impactful. The pandemic has shown that inequities which were previously unnoticed can suddenly widen and become crucial overnight. While the near future of higher education remains uncertain until the pandemic is overcome, one thing remains certain: there will be a growing need for equity-minded assessment practices driven and supported in ways this study describes.

Implications for Practice

This study demonstrates how centering assessment within larger conversations on student success can help drive equity-minded assessment forward. However, it reinforces the notion that if institutions conduct assessment primarily for accountability, then equity-minded assessment might not be as impactful since most of the supports and drivers for this work seem to rely on having an assessment culture for improvement. Montenegro and Jankowski (2020) state that equity-minded assessment relies upon an already establish assessment process, and that remains true. Equity-minded assessment is simply adding an intentional equity lens to already established assessment processes and changing them as needed. However, more research is needed on the pathways institutions can leverage to create a culture of improvement and then advance to create a culture of equity-mindedness in assessment.

It is important to keep in mind that this study is contextualized since it relies upon the experiences of two programs at Hispanic-Serving Institutions which implemented equity-minded assessment to help commuter students who were predominantly Latinx. Thus, the drivers of and supports for equity-minded assessment might look different at other institutions. This may be highly dependent on the institutional and/or program culture where equity-minded assessment is implemented. Some themes may be more prevalent than others. As such, there cannot and should not be a list of blanket requirements and tools institutions should be expected to use. Engaging in equity-minded assessment requires in-depth reflection and analyses of the institution's needs, students' needs, and what changes can be made to help meet those needs within a unique context. So, while it would be easy for external entities to require institutions to do some sort of equity 'thing' to get them engaged with equity-minded assessment, it might also be detrimental since institutions can focus on only meeting that expectation and not truly engaging in genuine equity-

minded assessment. Instead of direct requirements, broader guidance might be best. For example, some accreditors are now asking institutions to disaggregate assessment data by different student populations. They can take this further by encouraging institutions to do meaningful disaggregation (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2020), talk about the equity gaps they found and direct steps to remedy those inequities, and identify areas to continue to embed equity-mindedness in assessment. This approach encourages institutions to engage with equity-minded assessment without dictating how, and encourages them to explore avenues to expand their engagement. It would be less productive to demand institutions make specific comparisons in their data, look at specific populations since inequities differ by institution, to use specific assessment tools, or to dictate the types of changes institutions should make. However, since a lot of the support for equity-minded assessment did stem directly from policy and leadership messaging—the legitimized understanding that equity is something that matters and should be embedded in other goals/approaches—it would help for accreditors to recommend that assessment be used to explore and close inequities.

This study also furthers the understanding that assessment is not just a classroom or accreditation related activity, but it is best when implemented holistically across the curricular and co-curricular for internal improvement. Institutions need to evaluate the environment in which learning happens, the institutional policies and norms, and the different non-cognitive elements that contribute to differential outcomes attainment. The field of assessment would benefit from implementing more of this reflection to explore the context in which assessment happens. Why is assessment done the way it is? What voices are dominating assessment conversations? Who is benefitting from evidence-based changes? How culturally responsive are current assessment tools? How equity-minded are those conducting assessment and the overall

institution? Taking a step back and asking questions similar to these greatly helped Midwest University and West Coast University along the road toward equity-minded assessment, and other institutions can potentially benefit from doing so, as well. Continuously interrogating current assessment practices—a sort of meta-assessment—is not only a useful starting point but also good practice to help keep assessment relevant to ever changing student and institution/program needs.

Finally, this study also adds additional support to the notion that predominantly white institutions which recently transitioned to become Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) need to embrace a Hispanic-serving mission. As these case participants expressed, HSIs are devoted to equity and helping students, but still struggled with being Hispanic-enrolling instead of fully being Hispanic-serving. The HSI mission can often be an afterthought for institutions that have been predominantly white, and it is rarely reflected on their websites and marketing material; choosing to hide the identity except for securing funds. These institutions began to make the change towards embracing the HSI mission—including it more on marketing materials and making it a present identity on the website and campus—but it has taken time. It required intentional messaging from leadership to state the centrality of this identity and lead the rest of the campus to embrace the special mission. That change in rhetoric helped advance this equity-minded work, signaling that other HSIs may benefit from openly and intentionally embracing the HSI mission and truly becoming Hispanic-serving.

Implications for Research

Up to this point, most of the conversation in the literature has been about what equity-minded assessment is and culturally relevant tools, but the field of assessment also needs to know the types of environments, supports, and pathways to enable equity-minded assessment to

become the norm. Hence, more research is needed to understand how different institutions can get started with equity-minded assessment. More examples of practices institutions and programs have used to transition from assessment for accountability to assessment for improvement to equity-minded assessment. Also, more research needs to be done to better understand the impacts of different environments on equity-minded assessment itself. How does a two-year college enact and support equity-minded assessment compared to a four-year liberal arts college? What does this look like at Historically Black Colleges and Universities or at predominantly white institutions?

There is an opportunity within the assessment literature to explore how to get students more actively involved in assessment. How can assessment practitioners in different roles help give more agency to students in assessment? More research is needed on the benefits that students get by having greater agency in their education through an active role in assessment. Since there is still apprehension around involving students in assessment, perhaps more research on this topic can help bolster change by allowing assessment practitioners to see its value versus any assumed risk of delegitimizing the assessment process by involving students as partners in assessment.

There has been more and more scholarship about ePortfolios and transformative student records that seek to give students different avenues to take what they know and can do, package it into a story of their abilities, and use it during job interviews or other opportunities so they can showcase their skills (Eynon, Gambino, & Torok, 2014; Eynon & Gambino, 2017). However, there has been little talk about actually giving assessment data to students in ways they can understand it and put it to use. For example, there is great benefit in a student being able to see their progress along specific program and institutional outcomes, and then seeing which future

required courses map to those outcomes so they can be prepared and make appropriate enrollment decisions. If students are struggling with critical thinking, these data can help students see that maybe enrolling in three course that stress that outcome in the same semester may not be a good idea; while simultaneously having the agency to know they need to seek opportunities and resources to help them expand on that outcome. Putting data in the hands of students can also yield richer conversations between advisors and students about their education and career pathways since the information is available to both parties and not just the advisor. The field of assessment needs more research to this regard and examples of how institutions/programs are making assessment data accessible, understandable, and usable for students.

Finally, the field of assessment needs to better understand the long-term impacts on outcomes attainment and closing equity gaps through implementing equity-minded assessment; especially compared with assessment for accountability and even assessment for improvement without equity-mindedness. This research can potentially help others to see the value and urgency of equity-minded assessment, or at the very least allow institutions to identify which assessment approach can best help fill their needs and dispel some myths and assumptions. Assessment is a highly practical field, so having models and data such as these that help guide institutions and decision makers along this work can help identify the benefits of and need for equity-minded assessment.

Next Steps

This study's contributions to the literature will extend beyond this case study. For one, these data can extend into a long-term study by following up with the cases to add updated outcomes data and explore how these interventions have impacted student outcomes and if they

worked to close equity gaps. It would especially be useful to follow-up with Midwest University to see how an equity-minded assessment approach helped improve their undergraduate graduation and persistence rates along with specific student outcomes. For West Coast University, it would be interesting to explore how freshmen benefitting from equity-minded assessment practices have fared compared to their peers without this approach.

There are also plans to incorporate machine learning to quantify these qualitative data. By analyzing word clouds and how positive/negative word associations were used with different questions and/or by different study participants —i.e. by role, gender, race/ethnicity, department—can add further depth to the study. Incorporating machine learning can further help inform how individuals approach equity-minded assessment. Finally, this work will be submitted to assessment and higher education journals for publication in order to help contextualize still emerging conversations on equity-minded assessment.

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Call for Case Study Participants Survey Questions

1. Institutional affiliation

2. Primary Contact:

3. Role/Title:

   Email:

4. Secondary Contact:

5. Role/Title:

6. Email:

7. What does equity-minded assessment practice mean to you?

8. How do your assessment practices align with your definition?

9. What might other institutions learn from your experience with or example of equitable assessment practice to inform their own efforts?

10. Ranging from 1-5, how much do you agree with the following statements (5=strongly agree)

    a. Our assessment process is mindful of the student population being served.

    b. Language that is understandable to our various student populations is used when developing learning outcomes.

    c. We actively involve students in the assessment process.

    d. Our assessment tools are appropriate for our institution's diverse student population.

    e. We intentionally improve student learning through data driven change that impacts the experiences of all learners.

    f. Our assessment processes consider systems of power and oppression.

11. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your assessment practices?

Appendix B

Sample Interview Schedule for Data Collection at WCU

Monday, 13 May

Time Slot	Person, Role, Department	Location
9:00-10:00	George, Administrator, Academic Affairs	Administration Building 150
11:00-11:45	Carol, Administrator, Academic Affairs	College of Education 100
12:00-1:00	Kevin, Administrator, Student Affairs	Office of Student Affairs, 25
1:15-2:15	Sharon, Angel, & Carmela, Staff, Academic Affairs	Student Services 225C
3:00-4:00	Focus Group	College of Education 14
4:00-4:45	Mayra, Administrator, Academic Affairs	Office of Academic Affairs, 12

Tuesday, 14 May

Time Slot	Person	Location
9:00-10:00	Cindy, Administrator, Academic Affairs	Office of Academic Affairs, 33
11:00-11:45	Caroline, Administrator, Academic Affairs	Administration Building, 22
1:30-2:00	Clara, Administrator, Academic Affairs	Administration Building, 201
2:10-2:55	Emma, Faculty, Academic Affairs	College of Education 310
3:00-3:45	Martha & Karen, Administrators, Academic Affairs	College of Education 315
5:00-5:30	Recap with George & Emma	TBD

Appendix C

Sample Interview Protocol

Welcome & Review Informed Consent Form, and Scope of Study: 5 minutes

Opportunity for Participant to Ask Questions: 2 minutes

Offer Researcher Background and Stance on Equity-Minded Assessment: 3 Minutes

[*Ask Permission to Record*]

Structured Warm-up Questions:

1. Please describe to me your role within [the case]?

2. How would you describe assessment and how does it tie into your role?

3. What does equity mean to you?

4. What does equity in assessment mean to you?

Full Pool of Interview Questions: The most applicable questions for specific participants will be pulled from this list.

The following questions align with Research Question 1: Why do faculty, administrators, and staff involved in equity-minded assessment at diverse postsecondary institutions conduct assessment work from an equity perspective?

1. Help me understand your assessment process:

    a. Who leads/ has the responsibility for assessment work [in this case]?

    b. On average, how many different assessment measures do you use to understand what students know and can do? What are they?

c. Give me an overview of your assessment process from the outcomes phase to the end?

d. Do you disaggregate assessment results?

e. What do you do with assessment data?

f. How is assessment information/results shared? With whom?

g. Has the assessment process changed recently or do you expect it to change soon? If so, then how and why? If not, then why not?

h. Does the HSI designation impact assessment efforts in any way? How, why, or why not?

2. Why might it be important to conduct equity-minded assessments? Why does it matter to you?

3. What are the most important reasons for conducting assessment from an equity perspective [in this case]?

4. What types of assessment practice are equitable? Why?

a. Why aren't other assessment practices equitable in your opinion? How can other assessment practices you did not mention become more equitable?

5. How does this campus ensure equity in its assessment practices? How do you?

6. How did this campus begin assessing from an equity perspective?

7. What has been the most rewarding part of this work? What has been the most challenging?

8. Why do you think your peers are involved in this equitable assessment initiative?

9. Why do you think this is a worthwhile initiative?

10. Do you think students find equitable assessment beneficial? Why/Why not? How?

11. What needs to happen now to take this work to the next level?

12. What does it take to do equitable assessment work the "right" way? What do you think is the "right" way?

13. Why is this program (or why is an HSI) conducting assessment from an equitable perspective?

14. What role did the HSI mission have in these equitable practices? In other practices the institution engages in? In students' academic lives?

15. How can we improve? (just leave it open and see where the conversation goes)

16. Are we doing enough? (just leave it openly and see where the conversation goes)

The following questions align with Research Question 2: What role should undergraduate students—specifically students of color and those from populations outside of the campus majority—have in an equity-minded assessment processes?

1. Do you think students should have a more central role in assessment? If so, in which way(s)? If not, why not?

2. What would assessment look like if it had greater student involvement?

3. What challenges do you see/think of when it comes to increasing student involvement in assessment; specifically students of color?

4. Are students involved in assessment on this campus? If so in what ways, if not why not? Regardless of answer: How could this be improved upon to garner more student involvement?

5. Why do you think students traditionally haven't been more involved in assessment?

6. How could students be more involved in assessment? Does your answer change when thinking specifically of Latinx students or other students of color?

7. Would simply involving students in assessment make the process more equitable? Explain.

8. Devil's advocate: what would you say to someone who thinks that involving students in assessment invalidates the process /or what would you say to someone who thinks that assessments without direct student involvement perpetuates inequities?

9. What, if anything, have you learned from your students through these assessment efforts?

10. What do you think students have learned from you through these assessment efforts?

The following questions align with Research Question 3: How could equity become central to the assessment of student learning in support of student success?

1. What are important supports for equitable assessment practices [in this case]?

2. How can equity become a sustainable element of assessment?

3. What advice would you have for others attempting to begin equitable assessment practice?

4. What advice would you have for others attempting to scale up equitable assessment practice?

5. How does equitable assessment relate to the institution's larger student success initiatives?

6. Does equity in assessment promote the success of diverse learners? How? What are limitations? How could it do this better?

7. What has been the most eye opening experience in equitable assessment?

8. How does leadership support/hinder assessment? How does leadership support/hinder equitable assessment?

9. What barriers did you encounter in establishing equitable assessment practices? How did you overcome them?

10. Are there specific assessment practices which work best for certain student groups? Which ones? Why? What about some that did not?

11. What failures have you encountered in this process? What was learned for that?

12. Specifically speaking about improvement of teaching and learning:

    a. What can colleges and universities do better, if anything, to help students develop skills and knowledge they need to be effective in the classroom and beyond?

    b. What can HSIs in general do better, if anything, to help students develop skills and knowledge they need to be effective in the classroom and beyond?

    c. What can your institution do better, if anything, to help students develop skills and knowledge they need to be effective in the classroom and beyond?

The following questions deal with the campus context:

1. Generally speaking—not specifically about assessment—what special services, programs, or benefits does your institution provide for students? For what purposes or with what intended results?

2. How would you describe the culture of the campus? Of your program? At the course-level?

3. Is your institution welcoming of diverse learners? Do diverse learners feel welcomed at your institution?

4. What does it mean to be an HSI?

  a. How widespread is the knowledge that this is an HSI?

  b. How central is the HSI mission to other campus efforts?

5. Tell me about the aptitudes, preparedness, potential of:

  a. Your average student

  b. Your average Latinx student

  c. Your average commuter student?

6. Tell me about the faculty at this institution

  a. In your opinion, how do they feel about assessment?

  b. In your opinion, how do they feel about their students?

7. Tell me about the administration at this institution.

  a. In your opinion, how do they feel about assessment?

  b. How do they view equity?

  c. How do they view equity's role in assessment?

8. Does your institution have campus-wide student learning outcomes?

  a. Are they aligned to the institutional mission?

  b. Are they aligned to the program/course?

  c. Do you ensure that students are aware of these outcomes statements? If so, how?

  d. What is an example of a student learning outcomes and how is it assessed?

  e. Think of one of the student learning outcomes, how does it benefit student learning? What evidence do you have to support that?

9. Do you use assessment information to celebrate successes? If so how?

Concluding comments: Well, I want to be mindful of your time and give you the opportunity to ask any questions that may have come to mind during the interview. (*Give time to ask*). Would it be okay to contact you for any follow-up questions or clarification after I get a chance to sit down and listen to the interview once more? (*pause*). Thank you, again. I really appreciate your participation. (*Make sure they take the signed consent form and business card*).

SOCIAL BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE

Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research

Póngase las Pilas: Exploring Outcomes Assessment Practices at Hispanic-Serving Institutions to Improve Cultural Responsiveness and Student Involvement in Assessment Praxis

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Natasha Jankowski, Ph.D., Director, National Institute for

Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)

Department and Institution: Educational Policy, Organization & Leadership, University of Illinois Urbana Champaign

Address and Contact Information: 1310 S. 6th Street, Champaign, IL 61820 – njankow2@illinois.edu

Sponsor: N/A

Why am I being asked?   You are being asked to be a subject in a research study about assessment of student learning outcomes at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) that uses observations, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews. Little attention has been paid to the specifics as to how HSIs provide a variety of options for gathering, documenting, using, and sharing meaningful actionable evidence of student learning. Your institution has demonstrated an ability to continually engage in effective assessment practices, and therefore, you have been asked to participate in the research because of your expertise as a practicing assessment professional at an HSI.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. **If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.**

Approximately 20 subjects may be involved in this research undertaken by researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

What is the purpose of this research?   The bottom line is that assessment – the systemic and continued gathering of evaluative data to determine whether or not a student has attained a desired learning outcome and using that data to improve that outcome (Kuh et al., 2015) (i.e. not a synonym for testing) – has not kept pace with the changing higher education landscape. Overall, assessment plans and methods are not vetted for their applicability for all learners. This is to say, assessment as a field and practice still largely operates under the assumptions that there is a right way to conduct assessment, that college students are a homogeneous group, and that involving students in the assessment process invalidates the measurement process. The research literature indicates that there are various examples of assessment practices conducted in ways that value equity, diversity, and improving teaching and learning for all students. Examples of such assessment practice are predominantly found at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) which are tasked with the special mission of educating and uplifting specific racial/ethnic student populations (Baker, 2012).

By focusing on MSIs – specifically on Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) – this study can shed light on how culturally responsive and student-focused assessment practices can improve how Latinx students' learning is assessed. This study can help inform how HSIs and other colleges and universities which enroll Latinx students can better assess the learning outcomes of diverse others and improve Latinx students' educational outcomes.

What procedures are involved?   This research will be performed over the course of 2 days at your institution, and will require approximately 1 to 2 hours of your time. The study procedures are inclusive of two phases: (1) individual semi-structured interviews and (2) focus group discussions, both with assessment practitioners and others involved in assessment on your campus.

<Select either Phase I or Phase II for participants listed below>

Your participation is most relevant for Phase I, which involves semi-structured interviews of assessment practitioners on your campus. The interview will last approximately one hour, and will allow me the opportunity to get the story behind participants experiences (McNamara 1999), and uncover in-depth information about assessment at HSIs. I will ask open-ended questions about student learning outcomes assessment at your institution. The interviews will be audio recorded (with your permission), transcribed following the session, and held in the strictest confidence. Neither you nor your institution will be identified on the transcripts.

Your participation is most relevant for Phase II, which involves a focus group of 3-5 practicing assessment professionals or others involved at assessment at your institution. The hallmark of a focus group is the explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without interaction found in a group (Morgan, 1988). The focus group is estimated to last 1-2 hours and will be led by two group facilitators. They will ask open-ended questions about assessment and student learning outcomes at HSIs. The focus group will be audio recorded (with your permission) and transcribed following the session and held in strictest confidence. Neither you nor your institution will be identified on the transcripts. We do not

anticipate any risk to this study greater than normal life, but do know the risk involved in a group discussion is that someone may not respect your privacy despite our request for them to do so. We will ask everyone in the focus group to respect the privacy of other participants and to treat anything said in the group as confidential. However, please remember there is no guarantee that other participants will cooperate. We anticipate that the results of our discussion will increase our understanding of effective learning outcomes assessment at campuses across the nation and will inform the research for the project. The results of this study may be used for dissertations, scholarly reports, journal articles, and conference presentations. In any publication or public presentation pseudonyms will be substituted for any identifying information.

What are the potential risks and discomforts? To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

Are there benefits to taking part in the research? Taking part in this research study may not benefit you personally, but we [researchers] may learn new things that will help others. Your insights can also help to inform practices at other institutions.

What other options are there? You have the option to not participate in this study or end participation at any time.

Will my study-related information be kept confidential? Faculty, students, and staff who may see your information will maintain confidentiality to the extent of laws and university policies. Personal identifiers will not be published or presented. Once again, while we do not anticipate any risk to this study greater than normal life, but do know the risk involved in a group discussion is that someone may not respect your privacy despite our request for them to do so. We will ask everyone in the focus group to respect the privacy of other participants and to treat anything said in the group as confidential. However, please remember there is no guarantee that other participants will cooperate. We anticipate that the results of our discussion will increase our understanding of effective learning outcomes assessment at campuses across the nation and will inform the research for the project. The results of this study may be used for dissertations, scholarly reports, journal articles, and conference presentations. In any publication or public presentation pseudonyms will be substituted for any identifying information.

What are the costs for participating in this research? There are no costs to you for participating in this research.

Will I be reimbursed for any of my expenses or paid for my participation in this research? You will not be offered payment for being in this study.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study? If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.

Researchers also have the right to stop your participation in this study without your consent if:
1. They believe it is in your best interests;
2. You were to object to any future changes that may be made in the study plan;

In the event you withdraw or are asked to leave the study, you will still be compensated as described above.

Who should I contact if I have questions? Contact the researcher, Dr. Natasha Jankowski, Director, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment at 217.244.2155 or njankow2@illinois.edu:

- if you have any questions about this study or your part in it,
- if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research
- if you have additional information you would like to share for the benefit of this study.

What are my rights as a research subject? If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including questions, concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 217-333-2670 or e-mail OPRS at irb@illinois.edu

Remember: Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

By signing below, I certify that I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Participant (audio recorded)   Date

_____

Participant's Printed Name

_____   _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date (must be same as subject's)

_____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

ILLINOIS

OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR FOR RESEARCH

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

Notice of Approval: New Submission

November 28, 2018

Principal Investigator	Natasha Jankowski
CC	Erik Montenegro
Protocol Title	*Póngase las Pilas: Exploring Outcomes Assessment Practices at Hispanic-Serving Institutions to Improve Cultural Responsiveness and Student Involvement in Assessment Praxis*
Protocol Number	19351
Funding Source	Unfunded
Review Type	Exempt 2, 4
Status	Active
Risk Determination	No more than minimal risk
Approval Date	November 28, 2018

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved the research study as described.

Exempt protocols are approved for a five year period from their original approval date, after which they will be closed and archived. Researchers may contact our office if the study will continue past five years.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:
- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

Appendix F

Sample Coding Process & Theme Refinement

First Order Codes	Refined Codes	Final Code
Intentionality		
Intentional Program Design	Intentional Case Design	
Course Design		
Embedded Equity		
Intentional Use of Assessment for Equity	Intentionally Embedding Equity	
Scaling Equity in Assessment		
Add-on		
Assessment Culture of Improvement		Intentional Assessment
Actionable Data		
Assessment Plan		
Alignment		
Multiple Sources of Assessment	Assessment Culture of Improvement	
Direct Evidence		
Data Driven		
Culture of Inquiry		
Disaggregation		
Meaningful Disaggregation		
Transparency		

Note: some first order codes had already been refined/combined prior to the ones listed here. Since not all codes were combined into others, the steps prior are skipped to eliminate redundancy. The codes shown help to more clearly show how axial coding and the refinement process led to the final themes.