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# Early Career Education Faculty Perceptions of Assessment and Accreditation: A Look Into Individual Needs and Earlier Involvement

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EARLY CAREER EDUCATION FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT AND  
ACCREDITATION: A LOOK INTO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS AND EARLIER  
INVOLVEMENT

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine the perceptions and needs of first-year/early-career faculty (FYECF) as they interact with a College of Education's Assessment and Accreditation Office in the work that is vital in the continuous improvement and accreditation of their programs to determine potential ways to streamline this work within the office and engage faculty in these practices earlier in their careers. Six research questions guided this work: (1) What are the responsibilities given to FYECF and what level of support are they receiving for each of these duties? (2) What is the engagement level of FYECF in assessment and accreditation and overall understanding of these areas? (3) What are the potential effects of FYECF being more involved in assessment and accreditation work at the beginning of their faculty careers? (4) What are the most effective ways to engage and support FYECF in activities and requirements to support national accreditation and continuous quality improvement efforts? (5) How can OAA leadership and program/departmental leadership best support FYECF in these areas? (6) How could the implementation of a technology-driven task management system influence FYECF's task quality and completion?

Participants included six early career faculty within their first 3 years in higher education who participated in the study over the course of 6 weeks. Qualitative data sources included an open-response survey, focus group, and semi-structured interviews.

Coding resulted in three broad themes: importance of understanding accreditation processes, impact of support for FYECF, and seeing the “big picture.” Faculty were interested in being exposed to assessment and accreditation practices early in their careers in ways that allow for socialization and multi-platform training opportunities, with the support of formal mentors and OAA leadership. Action steps moving forward center on proactive OAA leadership in exposing faculty to the office’s work once they are hired, becoming part of a formal mentoring process for clinical and adjunct faculty, and piloting a technology-based task management system with embedded trainings.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Accreditation has been an important factor in higher education since the passage of the Higher Education Act (HEA) in 1965. In the United States, institutions of higher education are permitted to operate with considerable independence and autonomy. The United States does not have a centralized federal authority assuming control over the quality of postsecondary educational institutions, and the states assume varying degrees of control over education. As a consequence, educational institutions can vary widely in the character and quality of their programs. “To ensure a basic level of quality, the practice of accreditation arose in the United States as a means of conducting nongovernmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs” (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). One important factor of accreditation is the reliance of federal student aid funds on colleges’ recognition statuses with their designated accrediting bodies. Congress entrusted agencies with ensuring academic quality of educational institutions with the passing of HEA and incorporating this act with federal student aid funds.

The process of accreditation designates the quality and rigor of programs and indicates graduates’ preparedness for future employment, meeting standards set by the accrediting bodies. Assessment is part of this overall process and allows faculty and staff

to develop common understandings and frameworks to ensure their programs meet the rigor and quality demanded by the profession. Accreditation and assessment require

stakeholders to work together to meet accreditation standards and ensure continuous improvement. Therefore, having effective systems in place is critical to ensure that all faculty and staff involved with the assessment processes have a firm understanding of the purpose and importance of this work and are prepared to collect and analyze student data, implementing program changes and improvements as appropriate based on these results.

I have worked in the Office of Assessment and Accreditation (OAA) in the College of Education (COE) at a Research I university in the Southeast for the past few years. OAA is responsible for collecting accreditation and branding data for the college, gathering reports, analyzing pertinent data, and working with program areas on their assessment reports. I recently moved into the position of Director of OAA, previously being the Assessment Coordinator. OAA is a small office of only three employees but collaborates with faculty, staff, and students throughout the college, most closely with program coordinators. As Director, I manage various projects surrounding accreditation and assessment needs, submit national and state required reports such as Title II and branding reports such as US News and World Report, along with continuously updating college stakeholders on ever-changing policies and standards.

Working in OAA over these past few years, especially working with programs on their assessment reports and data summaries each semester, I have noticed the overwhelming number of tasks related to assessment and accreditation that we are required to delegate and manage with ongoing deadlines throughout the year. Indeed,

accreditation is an ongoing annual project that encompasses each program and office throughout the college, with most responsibilities given to program coordinators. The office relies solely on office-created Excel spreadsheets, email communication, and sporadic meetings with college leaders as a means of sharing information and keeping track of the various projects. Often, accreditation and assessment are a small percentage of the responsibilities that faculty and staff have at any given time, so our office must send numerous reminders to those involved in these tasks while also gathering data, planning, and analyzing information as part of these needs. Original deadlines sometimes come and go, with more work piling up and confusion occurring as a result of the numerous projects, extended deadlines, and an overall lack of knowledge of the importance and purpose of accreditation. This current system turns into the office often delegating tasks via email or during small-group meetings without those involved in the projects having a firm understanding of the reasoning behind these tasks or the end goal.

To give some background on the accreditation process, currently all state-accredited educator preparation providers must meet National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)/Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) standards according to state statute. All programs related to PK–12 educator preparation must either meet program-level standards recognized by NCATE/CAEP, the standards of another nationally recognized accrediting agency, or the program-level standards established by the State Board of Education. In 2018, the COE was recognized for national excellence in educator preparation by meeting new, rigorous CAEP national accreditation standards and will undergo the next review in 2024. At the university level, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)

has a separate set of standards that are reviewed every 10 years but requires annual assessment reports and a continuous review process. In addition, initial licensure programs must meet programmatic standards set by specialized professional associations and reviewed every 7 years. All the work involved with these accreditation needs is channeled through OAA, but the effort spans across the entire college, with most work ultimately being completed by program coordinators.

The COE has a total of four departments and 57 programs, 24 of which are initial licensure programs that lead to recommendation for teacher licensure. Each program has a coordinator who serves as both faculty and the program's representative at college-wide meetings. Faculty numbers vary depending on the size of the program, and staff often work with an entire department. In total, COE has over 240 employees, many of whom are involved in some means with the work of OAA. In terms of assessment and accreditation, the program coordinator in collaboration with program faculty and staff writes assessment reports, ensures faculty are informed of assessment needs, analyzes these data annually, and implements program changes and improvements based on these data. In many cases across departments, first year/early career faculty (FYECF) have little to no involvement in the assessment process due to the other demands of their research and teaching loads, with much of the work completed by more seasoned staff who also have many of these same demands. In the rare case of FYECF delegated these tasks, they are often searching for resources and assistance, completing the reports without a firm understanding of the purpose and connections to their work. Therefore, this descriptive study sought an understanding of the perceptions and needs of FYECF

relative to the assessment work that is critical in the continuous improvement and accreditation of their programs.

### **Problem of Practice**

Due to the nature of assessment and accreditation, standards and expectations are constantly changing, leaving OAA in a position of constantly delegating new tasks that are driven by policy. This variability leaves many others involved in the process, particularly faculty and program coordinators, with a negative attitude toward accreditation due to its rigorous standards and occasional lack of flexibility. When the college first adopted the CAEP standards as mandated by the state and began the process of aligning program practices with the requirements of the accrediting body, many faculty members were extremely opposed to the change. All involved in the process must have a voice and an understanding of the benefits of the assessment cycle in their individual work. Such priorities can get lost in the day-to-day work requirements. To encourage improvements in commitment and leadership, new faculty must understand and engage in accreditation activities early. Faculty members' first years in higher education are often spent acclimating to the culture of their institution along with adjusting to their new roles as instructors and researchers. One area that many FYECF have little involvement with during these early times is assessment and accreditation, which could lead to a continuous lack of knowledge and/or interest related to this area.

Beyond morale and attitudes toward the work, another problem lies in work not always being completed in a timely manner. OAA often sends multiple reminders via email, and with the number of other emails stakeholders receive and other projects requiring their attention, OAA reminders can get lost or put at the bottom of a list of other

responsibilities that may take precedence. Within the office, internal projects can be difficult to manage with the use of office-created processes such as Excel and Dropbox, contributing to systemic problems in both the processes OAA has in place and the motivation of team members on tasks that may seem repetitive and sometimes overwhelming without a return value.

Task management is a critical component of accreditation. Effective task management is multifaceted and involves faculty and the OAA staff. To first address these issues of task management, I must consider both my leadership style and the leadership style of those involved in these office projects and the effects these dynamics have on productivity. An effective leader must not only look at the needs of each of the team members, but also their current knowledge and experience levels in relation to the projects at hand. Northouse (2013) described the importance of the situational approach in leadership, which is based upon the idea that effective leadership requires adaptation. With this approach, different situations may call for different types of leadership. Leaders must consistently assess their team members' levels of motivation, skill sets, and abilities regarding different tasks, and adapt their level of directive and supportive behaviors appropriately based on these data and the team members' needs. Depending upon these needs, the workplace environment, and job responsibilities, the level of support from the leader can differ. Northouse (2013) suggested that team members "will be motivated if they think they are capable of performing their work, if they believe their efforts will result in a certain outcome, and if they believe that the payoffs for doing their work are worthwhile" (p. 137). Leaders must assure team members of these elements through the appropriate form(s) of motivation in order to promote success.

## **Theoretical Framework**

According to Grant and Osanloo (2014), the theoretical framework “is the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed (metaphorically and literally) for a research study. It serves as the structure and support for the rationale for the study” (p. 12). Since this study on focused on ways that OAA and program leadership can use information from early career faculty in order to begin resolving issues within the office and college surrounding accreditation, I grounded this study on the theory of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership emphasizes the increase in productivity that can result from working together and sharing ideas, thus creating a collaborative community. As Adler et al. (2011) proposed, “By marrying a sense of common purpose to a supportive structure, these organizations are mobilizing knowledge workers’ talents and expertise in flexible, highly manageable group-work efforts” (p. 4). If employees are incapable of working together, encouraging one another, and sharing ideas, the progress of the entity is hindered and valuable resources are wasted. An effective leader encourages collaboration throughout all levels of an organization so that these valuable ideas and resources can be shared, and in turn, can increase productivity.

Transformational leadership has several aspects but ultimately focuses on the relationships between leaders and followers. As Northouse (2013) stated,

Transformational leaders are recognized as change agents who are good role models, who can create and articulate a clear vision for an organization, who

empower followers to meet higher standards, who act in ways that make others want to trust them, and who give meaning to organizational life. (p. 214)

As opposed to simply giving directions and expecting one's followers to complete tasks, a transformational leader builds trusting relationships, understands and adapts to followers' needs, and provides a positive influence. This sort of transformation raises expectations throughout the workplace, which results in all-around success. A leader must build trust and communicate visions effectively with all members of an organization to be successful. With new faculty, engaging and connecting them with accreditation is imperative as they integrate into the college and become potential future leaders in their programs, departments, and college.

### **Research Questions and Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to seek a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of FYECF, including their involvement with assessment and accreditation and overall interest and potential effects of becoming more engaged in this work during their early years as faculty members. This purpose led to the following research questions:

1. What are the responsibilities given to FYECF and what level of support are they receiving for each of these duties?
2. What is the engagement level of FYECF in assessment and accreditation and overall understanding of these areas?
3. What are the potential effects of FYECF being more involved in assessment and accreditation work at the beginning of their faculty careers?



4. What are the most effective ways to engage and support FYECF in activities and requirements to support national accreditation and continuous quality improvement efforts?
5. How can OAA leadership and program/departmental leadership best support FYECF in these areas?
6. How could the implementation of a technology-driven task management system influence FYECF's task quality and completion?

### **Positionality**

Researcher positionality plays a vital role in qualitative research as the researcher is the primary instrument for collection, categorization, analysis, and reporting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Herr and Anderson (2015) discussed the positionality of action research as “open,” meaning either “insiders to the setting are the researchers” in some cases, and in other cases, “the researcher is an outsider who collaborates to varying degrees with insider practitioners or community members” (p. 3). Positionality is so important because it is part of a researcher's story and determines how to conduct the research and whom to involve. To identify my role as an action researcher in this study, I positioned myself as an insider. As an employee of the university working as a full-time staff member and director of OAA, I am an active member of the setting and was immersed in the research. I am heavily involved in all OAA work but collaborate with many others, such as COE faculty, staff, and their affiliates.

As an insider researcher, I recognized that collaboration with these other insiders would come into play. In the future, I also hope to collaborate with outsiders in similar

positions to seek out potential systems in place in peer institutions. My position at the college could potentially impact my study in that I am the main delegator of assessment and accreditation related tasks, but my role as a researcher was to gain a better understanding from FYECF and suggestions for ways to engage these colleagues in this work. The director of OAA is an interesting role within the COE because although I am an authority figure within my office and am responsible for keeping the entire college informed of any policies that must be instituted within the realm of accreditation, I only have the power to make these recommendations. It is ultimately the authority of our faculty to approve and institute any changes within the college, with the backing of my leadership and others within the college. Therefore, the results of this study and future recommendations can only be put into practice with the support and agreeance of my colleagues. I have a very positive attitude toward assessment and accreditation because I easily see the benefits that they bring to our programs, but as I discussed within my problem statement, not all others within the college have this same stance, so it is imperative that we collaborate and create a balance that will support all involved in this work.

### **Research Design and Methods**

This qualitative action research study used a phenomenological design, which “focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). The intentional design aligned with my role as an active member of the organization and facilitated various levels of data collection to produce themes related to my research questions. Qualitative data were

collected through interviews, a survey, and a focus group throughout the course of the study to interpret the perceptions and viewpoints of participants. These data showcased the roles of FYECF, involvement in and understanding of assessment and accreditation, and the potential effects of this research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe action research as research conducted by practitioners who seek to improve their practice. To potentially improve the productivity of the office and engage the participants, I looked closely at participation insight. The data collection methods used throughout this study are described below and expounded within Chapter 3.

- Open-ended surveys – These open-ended surveys were used in conjunction with Likert-scale surveys at the beginning of the study to determine participants’ perceptions of and attitudes toward assessment/accreditation tasks, their involvement in these tasks, and the possible effects of a technology-driven task management system. Data from these surveys also guided the semi-structured interview questions.
- Focus group – A focus group was conducted with the participants involved following the survey distribution. Within a group, the participants were able to discuss their views and perceptions while also hearing from others, allowing them to further refine and share their thoughts through this collaborative process. Following the focus group, I used coding to establish themes, which further guided my semi-structured interview questions.
- Semi-structured interviews – Due to the nature of this study, semi-structured interviews were ideal for determining participants’ perceptions. These one-on-one interviews with a subgroup of participants occurred after the distribution of

surveys and completion of the focus group to improve my understanding of the participants' individual experiences and perceptions and clarify insights from the survey and focus group. I used coding to analyze the data obtained from these interviews.

## **Participants**

My participants included six COE FYECF from initial and advanced licensure programs. These participants represented a purposeful sample, due to their experience levels and programmatic placement. As Merriam & Tisdell (2016) suggest, this type of sampling is selected when the researcher “wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 96). Each participant engaged in a survey, focus group, and interviews with questions focused on gaining a better understanding of their roles as FYECF, involvement in and understanding of assessment and accreditation, and the potential effects of this research. With the office having such specific tasks to complete and the need for a better understanding from FYECF in the college, purposeful sampling fits the needs of this study.

## **Rationale for Action Research**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe action research as research conducted by practitioners to improve their practice, adding,

It not only seeks to understand how participants make meaning or interpret a particular phenomenon or problem in their workplace, community, or practice,

but it also usually seeks to engage participants at some level in the process in order to solve a practical problem. (p. 49)

During my time in OAA, issues with project management and the low morale in regard to assessment and accreditation tasks across the college have arisen each semester.

Although these tasks may not always be at the top of my colleagues' priority lists, all state-accredited educator preparation providers must meet NCATE/CAEP standards.

Also, all programs related to PK–12 educator preparation must either meet program-level standards recognized by NCATE/CAEP, the standards of another nationally recognized accrediting agency, or the program-level standards established by the State Board of Education. At the university level, the college must meet standards set by SACSCOC, all resulting in the requirement of the continuous review process.

Regarding action research, Herr and Anderson (2015) highlighted the importance of collaboration with others in the setting who have a stake in the problem under investigation, noting that even a “lone practitioner” should seek “ongoing feedback [...] from other stakeholders in the setting or community” (p. 10). Although I considered myself a lone practitioner in this study, I involved others in my office and throughout the college whom I work with on a regular basis and who play an important part in the continuous improvement process. The effects that this research could potentially have on not only my office, but the assessment practices of the college overall are vast.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant across all programs in the college, but especially initial and advanced licensure programs that have more stringent state mandates. Although my

study is based on assessment and accreditation related tasks in the college, the process can be duplicated in other aspects of work in the college and in other institutions with similar accreditation-related tasks involving those in the early years of their work.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

As I explained in Chapter 1, my institution's OAA is responsible for collecting accreditation and branding data for the college, gathering reports, analyzing pertinent data, and working with program areas on their assessment reports. Despite the overwhelming number of tasks, FYECF are seldom involved in assessment and accreditation. Moreover, the OAA lacks a systematic task management system, causing a variety of issues including the inability to easily delegate tasks, share information, check in with stakeholders, and evaluate the progression of projects while also keeping in mind the various working and management styles of those involved with the work. I aimed to resolve such issues by improving collaboration and work management through the study of FYECF and their involvement in these processes during these early years of their career.

#### **Purpose Statement**

This descriptive study seeks to understand the responsibilities given to FYECF, their engagement in and understanding of assessment and accreditation, the probable effects of being more involved in this work at the beginning of their faculty careers with support from OAA and program leaders, and the possible influence of a technology-based management system on this work.

This purpose statement leads to the following research questions.

### **Research Questions**

Six research questions guided my efforts to resolve my problem of practice:

1. What are the responsibilities given to FYECF and what level of support are they receiving for each of these duties?
2. What is the engagement level of FYECF in assessment and accreditation and overall understanding of these areas?
3. What are the potential effects of FYECF being more involved in assessment and accreditation work at the beginning of their faculty careers?
4. What are the most effective ways to engage and support FYECF in activities and requirements to support national accreditation and continuous quality improvement efforts?
5. How can OAA leadership and program/departmental leadership best support FYECF in these areas?
6. How could the implementation of a technology-driven task management system influence FYECF's task quality and completion?

### **Chapter Organization**

This chapter covers literature that looks through several lenses relative to the problem of practice: the history and perceptions of accreditation, needs of FYECF in regard to support and mentoring, leadership theories for ensuring motivation and increasing morale. I begin with discussing historical perspectives on accreditation, using articles and textbooks that share theories and research. I then discuss relevant research on



these topics, including comparisons and contrasts of different points of view and/or research outcomes.

### **Literature Review Methodology**

I used several search strategies to locate the literature in this chapter. As part of my master's program in organizational leadership, I learned of many leading theorists. Using this knowledge, I researched articles pertaining to transformational leadership and organizational culture. For my topics pertaining to technology and the needs of FYECF, I began researching Google Scholar articles surrounding online databases, technology use in higher education, and benefits of task management systems. From there, I used ERIC, EBSCO, and Academic Search Complete through the University of South Carolina Libraries online database to narrow my search. I used peer-reviewed journals as my main source material but also included textbooks.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This descriptive study, which focused on engagement and commitment to higher education assessment and accreditation, is grounded in leadership theory. To ensure an increase in morale and motivation of the stakeholders in the college while also determining the most effective ways to engage multiple program coordinators in activities and requirements to support national accreditation and continuous quality improvement efforts, I considered effective leadership styles that support successful organizational change. Transformational leadership focuses on shared vision, collaboration, and the encouragement of change. Through clear development and communication of shared vision, transformational leaders “find clear and workable ways

to overcome obstacles, are concerned about the qualities of the services their organization provide, and inspire other members to do likewise” (Swail, 2003, as cited in Basham, 2012, p. 344). Within this framework, it is important to consider the historical perspectives of leadership and accreditation along with related research.

### **Historical Perspectives: Accreditation**

Looking first through the lens of the accreditation requires consideration of the beginnings of this process. Accreditation has been an important element in higher education since the passage of the Higher Education Act (HEA) in 1965. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this act in part ensured that programs and institutions would engage in an evaluation system that ensured that students were receiving a quality education (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Ewell (2010) documented the changes in quality assurance, which is part of the accreditation process, over the course of 20 years (1990–2010) since the United States first required institutional accrediting organizations and suggested future implications. In 1990, including student learning outcomes as part of the institutional review standards was introduced by the federal Department of Education. One reason for the growing emphasis on learning outcomes is that traditional methods of instruction are being rapidly transformed (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Distance and technology-based modes of teaching and learning, as well as self-paced approaches, are becoming the new norm for higher education worldwide. Much that affects quality assurance has changed in the ensuing 2 decades, including a steadily increasing focus on undergraduate teaching and learning in the academy generally, transformed modalities for instructional delivery, and the fact that higher education quality assurance has become trans-national (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). These changes to quality assurance

have proven to have positive impacts such as creating transparency and intentionality, but the overall impact of student learning evidence is still unclear (Ewell, 2010).

There are also many historical considerations concerning the barriers in achieving accreditation and inequities involved in the push toward compliance. Fester et al. (2012) investigated the effects of accreditation on historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), documenting the history of southern states specifically, where “HBCUs were segregated into review processes at ‘Black’ accrediting organizations, and even when they were allowed to join mainstream organizations, they were evaluated using a separate scale up until 1961” (p. 807). Likewise, Anderson (1988) stated, “Black colleges, however segregated, could not exist apart from the power and control of white standardizing agencies” (p. 251). Fester et al. (2012) also considered the implications of all colleges’ being held to the same standards yet differing in many ways, including funding and student population, such that “...minority-serving institutions are tasked with educating the most underserved students and are required to produce better results with less resources, and still they are evaluated using the same accreditation standards as prestigious public flagship and private institutions” (p. 816). Fernandez and Burnett (2020) found similar conclusions in their research, adding, “Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) often come under undue public scrutiny, sometimes inadvertently, when policymakers evaluate MSIs using the same standards that they use for more homogeneous institutions” (p. 855). Accreditation fees can be extensive, and for underfunded institutions serving underserved students, reaching the rigid standards set by these agencies along with the cost can be large barriers. The history surrounding the origination of accreditation shows the inequities in which accrediting standards were built

upon and contributes to the continued hesitation that many can have in engaging in these processes.

Baltodano (2012) also discussed the issue of neoliberalism reforms and the effects of this political approach on public education, arguing that neoliberalism is “undermining the major structures, processes, and institutions of American liberal democracy, particularly public education” and accrediting bodies such as CAEP (previously NCATE) “have shaped the current state of teacher preparation and contributed to the destruction of public schooling” (p. 488). Baltodano (2012) recounts the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) as “one of the most important achievements of neoliberalism” due to its removal of local school control (p. 495). Considering the effects on higher education, accrediting bodies such as CAEP reign over institutions just as acts such as NCLB do with P–12 schools, with Baltodano (2012) noting that “schools of education are seeking accreditation at higher rates to become more marketable because what sells well is the promise of accountability and excellence” (p. 499). Some researchers argue that rather than ensuring quality, accrediting bodies are removing the autonomy of higher education institutions and further perpetuating the idea of education being “for profit” rather than a public service grounded in social justice.

### **Social Justice and Accreditation**

Accreditation assures quality in educator preparation, providing a seal of approval in that programs are preparing new teachers effectively (CAEP, 2020). CAEP’s (2020) mission indicates:

Accreditation provides a framework that has pushed educator preparation programs to continually self-assess and conduct evidence-based analysis of their programs and their efficacy. These evidence-based shifts, rooted in continuous improvement, are helping to ensure that preparation programs are more likely to produce successful educators. (n.p.)

This study sought to establish an understanding of FYECF's engagement in the assessment and accreditation processes and possible effects of a technology-driven task management system on these processes to further the rigor and level of understanding of accreditation. My broader aim was to ensure that all students within my institution continue to receive a fair and quality education on par with other colleges and universities throughout the United States. As indicated in Chapter 1, the United States does not have a centralized federal authority that controls the quality of postsecondary education, so educational institutions can vary widely without the oversight and peer review processes of accrediting bodies in place. (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). As part of the CAEP standards, diversity is a cross-cutting theme that all programs must address, and two of CAEP's (2020) five overall goals are based in principles of equity and diversity:

CAEP will ensure consistent application of the principles of equity and diversity in its evaluation of programs and CAEP will continuously monitor and improve internal policies, processes, and procedures to assure transparency, accountability, fiscal efficiency, and high quality service and support, to serve as a model of equity and attention to diversity.

Institutions that provide teacher education programs that align to the CAEP Standards are ensuring in part that their program completers are receiving a quality education that is based on these principles of equity and diversity.

### **Related Research**

When considering the research questions involved with this study grounded in leadership theory, it is important to examine research on accreditation perceptions, leadership perspectives, and the needs of early career faculty in regard to support and mentoring, as described below.

#### **Research on Accreditation Perceptions**

Germaine and Spencer (2016) examined faculty perceptions of a self-study during an accreditation process to ensure continuous improvement for their college and so “others who embark on an initial accreditation process” might have “fewer barriers to overcome” (p. 68). They administered surveys to all full-time faculty each spring over a period of 7 years. Survey data indicated that faculty felt positively about the accreditation processes overall and that it encouraged collaboration between them and individual programs. Based on the researchers’ findings, they offered several recommendations to make this process more beneficial: meeting face-to-face to work on accreditation tasks, making standards part of everyday work, and making accommodations “for the time needed to work on accreditation tasks to reduce the feeling of being overwhelmed” (Germaine & Spencer, 2016, p. 90). Ultimately, accreditation cannot be accomplished by just a few people during review cycles; it must be implemented on a daily basis into

everyone's work that is involved in programs seeking or retaining accreditation in order to be beneficial.

Salto (2017) also looked to determine faculty perceptions of the accreditation process by conducting a study that examined how institutions of higher education respond to new policies. The study focused on interviews with administrators and directors who implemented these policies and accreditation reviews. Salto determined that accreditation was not beneficial to their overall continuous improvement, slowing down their processes, and resulting in programs' not making major documented revisions. The study also determined that faculty perceived that "administrators and directors may use accreditation results to preserve the status quo" rather than promoting change (Salto, 2017, p. 83). Results also indicated that internal review processes may be more strenuous than standards set by external accreditors. This study emphasizes the importance of combating the status quo when engaging in accreditation processes and how easily institutions can fall into compliance rather than working towards change.

Canner et al. (2020) shared "an approach to assessing institutional learning outcomes using reflective faculty engagement," explaining that faculty and staff at California State University, Monterey Bay are "guided by [their] belief that assessment should be directed by faculty, recognize both faculty expertise and potential for growth, emphasize the centrality of improving student learning, foster dialogue and community-building, and produce usable results" (p. 1). Using this process, several assessment scholars noted that they were surprised by how engaging and helpful it was. The researchers emphasized that shifting the dialogue from simply having to meet accrediting standards for compliance to using data obtained from assessments that are used as part of

accreditation is a catalyst to improve programs and encourage action. Canner (2020) added, “Nevertheless, the challenge remains on how to reach the majority of faculty rather than just a small group that the college currently has engaged. Creating engaging, learning-centered, institution-level assessments is an important and necessary step” (p. 4). The engagement of this pilot group shows the potential for success across the entire college, and in implementing comparable practices in similar entities.

Rapid changes caused by rigorous accreditation standards can cause faculty resistance, as indicated by Bird (2001). This researcher looked at such pushback and described how using selected principles of group dynamics (group cohesion building) might decrease faculty resistance while increasing their motivation to participate in the development of a student learning outcomes program. Consensus is growing in higher education that assessment of student learning outcomes is here to stay. However, some faculty continue to resist participating in activities associated with the assessment process. For a group dynamics approach to have significant positive effect on the motivation of group members, facilitation is essential. The group facilitator could be an assessment coordinator, department chair, or faculty leader. By participating in conversations directed toward value identification and clarification, members come to see areas of common concern and mutual importance. Those interactions then serve to facilitate individual engagement in the group and commitment among group members. These discussions provide the foundation for building group cohesion.

Although assessment and accreditation processes can be strenuous, many faculty at various colleges find the process valuable when integrated in appropriate ways. Implementing similar initiatives at my college, including working collaboratively,



engaging in professional development, and producing usable results, can shift the perception in a more positive direction and work toward a more productive environment.

### **Research on Needs of FYECF in Regard to Support and Mentoring**

With this study focusing on the roles and responsibilities of early career faculty and their possible inclusion in assessment and accreditation related tasks, it is important to consider the research surrounding their needs in regard to support and mentoring. Among considerable research on FYECF needs, McAvoy et al. (2021) conducted an exploratory case study of FYECF to better understand their experiences. This study involved interviewing eight tenure-track FYECF with 9 months of time between each interview, using a semi-structured interview design. The researchers found “several factors which affect all FYECF. These factors include loneliness and intellectual isolation, lack of collegial support, heavy workloads, and time constraints” (McAvoy et al., 2021, p. 4). The study gave possible solutions based on the perspectives of faculty who were living this experience: “Socialization, training and on-boarding all play an important role in the long-term success of the faculty member and, consequently, the organization. Many FYECF can benefit from strong mentoring and need assistance with learning the institutional climate and culture” (McAvoy et al., 2021, p. 1). The researchers also concluded that FYECF are assets that should be involved in curriculum development, since “they bring a new, different kind of perspective, different methodologies and paradigms that enrich the curriculum we’re given” (McAvoy et al., 2021, p. 11). Although FYECF are sometimes overwhelmed with their new responsibilities and may face heavy workloads, building their faculty voice is important and including them in

program decisions, such as curriculum development, prepares them for the work involved with assessment and accreditation.

Mentoring is commonly identified as a necessary component for ensuring success in individuals' first years in an organization, particularly in a college or university setting, "with effective mentoring being positively associated with job satisfaction, productivity, promotion, socio-emotional support, professional identity, and sense of competence" (Minshew et al., 2020, p. 288). Minshew et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study consisting of focus groups and interviews exploring the aspects of a mentoring program designed for junior faculty and found the formalized structure along with the strong relationships between mentors and mentees were the main strengths. They concluded that "mentoring is critical to the professional development of faculty, supporting faculty retention and job satisfaction, and reducing faculty burnout" (Minshew et al., 2020, p. 288). Conn et al. (2018) also highlighted the importance of effective mentorship for junior faculty by adding, "strong mentor relationship[s] will facilitate building a network of colleagues who may become collaborators" (p. 168).

McDaniel et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study that examined a clinical faculty mentorship program by interviewing 23 faculty over the course of 6 months. Their study focused on clinical faculty's perceptions of the mentorship program that contained collaborative elements such as "topic-targeted sessions and small-group exercises" that "created opportunities for faculty to interact and learn from one another" (McDaniel et al., 2019, p. 111). Results of the study showed that programs with this type of formal structure that includes opportunities for this connection "may help to cultivate community, practical skills, and broadened perspectives

(McDaniel et al., 2019, p. 111). As evidenced throughout each of these sources, mentoring is a key factor in the success of early career faculty in all areas of their roles.

### **Research on Leadership Perspectives**

This study was grounded in the theory of transformational leadership due to the need for both OAA leadership and program leadership to become change agents in working to improve the processes involved with assessment and accreditation and incorporating FYECF into this work, but other leadership theories should also be considered that include elements of all successful leaders, reminiscent to the elements of transformational leadership. Leader-member exchange theory is the idea that an in-group and out-group exists within all organizations, and that closing this gap is the leader's responsibility (Power, 2013). Members of the in-group go above and beyond their job duties and are constantly looking for ways to advance. With this level of involvement, leaders will more often give these members of the group additional responsibilities and opportunities. Those in the out-group do not strive to add additional duties to their current roles, and leaders in turn, do not treat them with the same level of attention given to members of the in-group. Power (2013) suggested, "leadership is more effective when leaders and followers are able to develop mature [partnerships] and thus gain access to the many benefits these relationships bring" (p.279). Workplaces can distinguish between the in-group and out-group, which can hinder the overall success of the workplace. Considering assessment and accreditation, early career faculty could consider themselves to be part of this out-group with having little involvement in the work, so leaders across the college must work to close this gap between the in-group and out-group by giving all members of an organization equal consideration along with comparable responsibilities

through communicating effectively with all levels of the organization, building trust, and encouraging collaboration (Power, 2013).

Collaborative leadership has many similarities to transformational leadership and the leader-member exchange theory in the inclusion of closing the gaps between in- and out-groups and encouraging collaboration across all members in an organization.

Hallinger and Heck (2010) discussed the positives that can be achieved in various levels of a school environment using collaborative leadership. The researchers conducted a longitudinal study over the course of 4 years that involved 192 elementary schools that included data from a parent and teacher survey. The study indicated “significant direct effects of collaborative leadership on change in the schools’ academic capacity and indirect effects on rates of growth in student reading achievement” (Hallinger & Heck, 2010, p. 654). Iachini et al. (2018) conducted a mixed-methods study measuring the benefits of collaborative leadership in an interprofessional education course. The researchers found that when a collaborative leadership model was integrated within their courses, “students learned to view leadership as more of a team effort than the actions of a single individual and as more of a process than a role” (Iachini et al., 2018, p. 235). Many of the projects and tasks that are required as a part of accreditation involve collaboration with faculty and staff at all levels, so incorporating elements of this theory into OAA and programmatic leadership is critical.

Purpose-driven leadership encourages motivation not only in the sense of instilling purpose into your followers, but also for leaders to find a purpose in their role to motivate fellow organizational members. Holloman et al. (2007) added, “this constructive leadership model challenges an organisation to: define its purpose, maintain integrity,

encourage character, prevent burnout and sustain vitality” (p. 438). These researchers challenge organizational members to continuously question leadership to better understand the purpose of their work and offered, “Sustained vitality can only be achieved if the culture of the school becomes purpose-driven” (Holloman et al., 2007, p. 443). Kempster et al. (2011) explored these ideas as well and suggested that “purpose is central to leadership and research has illustrated that the presence of purpose can have desirable motivational affects [*sic*] on followers” (p. 325). Part of motivating organizational members is instilling a purpose into the organization so that all can see the benefits of their work. With accreditation, faculty members may only view it as a compliance-based process that does not provide any value to their work. Leadership must instill purpose into all who are involved in this work, particularly early in their careers when they first begin collecting key assessment data for their programs’ assessment plans as part of accreditation.

In McAvoy et al.’s (2021) study, some of the participants shared their dismay with the hierarchy of their institution and the negative effects that this type of leadership can have. One participant shared, “It can be viewed as a type of trickle-down power and there is a lack of collaborative leadership throughout the whole institution. I feel my voice won’t be heard because of the system that is set” (McAvoy et al., 2021, p. 11). The study showed that this power structure removed many FYECF voices in decision making. Demir (2008) conducted a study investigating the correlation between teacher efficacy and transformational leadership. A total of 218 teachers participated in the study, completing a survey with questions measured by a Likert scale. The results of this study reinforced the idea that administrators that exhibited transformational leadership

behaviors had a significant relationship with the collaborative school culture. Demir (2008) also added, "...principals who empower their staff by sharing decision making on these issues contribute to higher teacher efficacy" (p. 106). Implementing these behaviors as a leader in the college could also promote morale and increase productivity, improving the culture and perceptions of accreditation tasks.

To address the issues of task management and productivity in terms of assessment and accreditation, I must consider how my leadership style as the director of OAA impacts faculty throughout the college involved in these projects, particularly FYECF as their involvement in assessment and accreditation potentially increases along with the leadership elements that must be present for program leaders to become change agents in this work. Transformational leadership, along with the elements included in additional leadership theories presented throughout this chapter, has proven to increase both productivity and motivation in various sectors.

### **Summary**

With OAA's systemic issues involving task delegation, task management, and information sharing related to accreditation related tasks, this study considers the history of accreditation and the impact since its creation, particularly how this affects our current systems in place relative to this work. Research has shown accreditation can have many benefits to institutions when implemented in an inclusive and methodical way as indicated throughout this chapter, but there is also debate on the origins of these processes and their overall benefits. Leadership perspectives also informed this study, including the elements of collaborative leadership, purpose-driven leadership, and leader-member exchange theory along with transformational leadership, which was central to

the study. Effective leaders institute practices that include elements of each of these proven theories.

Another factor that influences this study is how FYECF's involvement in this work can also impact both these current systems in place and the roles and responsibilities of instructors while also considering their workloads and support needs. The research presented supports the inclusion of FYECF in decision making processes throughout their institutions, with strong mentoring in place due to their multi-faceted roles. As McAvoy et al. (2021) indicated, "FYECF must learn to navigate their roles while executing and balancing the responsibilities of a faculty member and stressors, including lack of clarity, personal responsibilities, balance, and time demands require mentoring and collegial relationships to overcome" (p. 4). The participants included within this study all faced many of these demands with an overall interest in becoming more involved in assessment and accreditation tasks as explained throughout Chapter 4, but the implications of this study must consider the research presented surrounding these areas along with leadership and accreditation perspectives.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

As I explained in Chapter 1, working in the OAA, especially working with programs on their assessment reports and data summaries each semester, I have noticed the overwhelming number of tasks to delegate and manage with ongoing deadlines throughout the year. This study aimed to determine the perceptions and needs of FYECF as they interact with OAA and program coordinators in the assessment work that is vital in the continuous improvement and accreditation of their programs. This descriptive study sought to understand FYECF responsibilities, their engagement in and understanding of assessment and accreditation, the probable effects of being more involved in this work at the beginning of their faculty careers with support from OAA and program leaders, and the possible influence of a technology-based management system.

Six research questions guided this work: (1) What are the responsibilities given to FYECF and what level of support are they receiving for each of these duties? (2) What is the engagement level of FYECF in assessment and accreditation and overall understanding of these areas? (3) What are the potential effects of FYECF being more involved in assessment and accreditation work at the beginning of their faculty careers? (4) What are the most effective ways to engage and support FYECF in activities and



requirements to support national accreditation and continuous quality improvement efforts? (5) How can OAA leadership and program/departmental leadership best support FYECF in these areas? (6) How could the implementation of a technology-driven task management system influence FYECF's task quality and completion?

### **Research Design**

This qualitative action research study used a phenomenological design to focus “on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). Moreover, practitioners conduct action research to improve their practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, this design suited my study because I am an active member of the organization and wanted to collect various types of qualitative data—through interviews, a survey, and a focus group—to interpret participants’ perceptions and viewpoints. These data showcased the roles of FYECF, their involvement in and understanding of assessment and accreditation, and the potential effects of this research, which can, in turn, improve the OAA systems and increase FYECF knowledge and understanding of assessment and accreditation.

### **Participants and Sampling Plan**

Due to the nature of qualitative research in which generalization is not a goal, nonprobability sampling is common, especially purposeful sampling, which Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described as “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 96). With purposeful sampling, selection criteria are essential,

hence my decision to select participants due to their placement in program areas and their experience level. I began with a list of all new faculty in the program by department: eight in EDST, six in ITE, three in EDLP, and two in PEDU. From this list of 19 faculty, four were tenure-track while the others were clinical or adjunct. Although I originally sought a variety of university positions for the study, all the early-career faculty affiliated with initial or advanced licensure programs in the COE who were able to participate were either classified as clinical or adjunct, so no tenure-track or assistant professors were involved in the study. The participants included a total of six COE FYECF from initial and advanced licensure programs, selected due to their placement in program areas and their experience level. Faculty in their first year in the role were selected at the midpoint of the academic year. To represent the entirety of the college, I selected at least one FYECF involved with initial and/or advanced licensure programs from each of the following departments: Educational Studies (EDST), Instruction and Teacher Education (ITE), Physical Education (PEDU), Educational Leadership and Policies (EDLP). The study involved a mixture of faculty in their first, second, and third years to represent each of these early-career levels.

All the participants were White females, three in their first year as a faculty member, two in their second year, and one in their third year. Each participant engaged in a survey and focus group, while a subgroup of the participants engaged in a semi-structured interview, with questions focused on gaining a better understanding of their roles as FYECF, involvement in and understanding of assessment and accreditation, and the potential effects of this research. With the office having such specific tasks to

complete and the need for a better understanding from FYECF in the college, a purposeful sampling fit the needs of this study.

### **Research Setting**

Interviews and the focus group occurred virtually through Zoom, and participants completed surveys through Qualtrics. The COE has a total of four departments and 57 programs, 24 of which are initial licensure programs that lead to recommendation for teacher licensure and three of which are advanced licensure programs that lead to recommendation for licensure in advanced areas. At the college level, all initial licensure programs and two Educational Administration licensure programs are involved in CAEP Accreditation, while all the Counselor Education programs complete a separate accreditation process through the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). At the university level, all programs must complete annual assessment plans and collect data cyclically as part of the requirements for SASCOC regional accreditation. Each program has a coordinator who serves as both faculty and the program's representative at college-wide meetings. Faculty numbers vary depending on the size of the program, and staff often work with an entire department. In total, COE has over 240 employees, many of whom are involved in some means with the work of OAA.

### **Timeline**

The study took place over 6 weeks, with the survey distributed through Qualtrics and completed by participants during the first 2 weeks. The focus group took place virtually via Zoom during the third week, with questions aligned to the survey questions.

The semi-structured interviews took place during the fourth and fifth weeks, with questions and participants determined from data collected via the survey and focus group. Data analysis occurred throughout the study, with final themes determined and sorted during the final weeks.

### **Data Collection Methods**

As I have already noted, my qualitative study included an open-ended survey, a focus group, and individual semi-structured interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described qualitative researchers as those who are “interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed; that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 14). They described four key characteristics: “the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). This type of research was appropriate for my study because I wanted to understand the participants’ thoughts as FYECF in relation to their responsibilities and perceptions of assessment and accreditation.

#### **Surveys**

Although this was a qualitative study, I included Likert-scale survey questions in conjunction with open-ended survey questions at the beginning of the study to gain an understanding of FYECF perceptions and needs relative to the assessment work that is critical in the continuous improvement and accreditation of their programs. The Likert scale was 5 points, with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree. These questions sought the same key factors of interest as the open-ended questions:

- The responsibilities given to FYECF
- Level of support given to FYECF
- Knowledge of and level of comfort with the assessment and accreditation processes
- Interest and engagement in assessment and accreditation
- Probable effects of being involved in work related to assessment and accreditation at the beginning of their faculty careers
- Possible influence of a technology-based management system on this work

The survey included 31 questions, of which 18 were Likert-scale, 9 were open-ended items, and 4 related to demographics.

**Table 3.1: Early Career Faculty Members’ Involvement in and Perception of Assessment and Accreditation Survey with Survey Item Category and Response Type**

Survey Item	Survey Item Category	Item Response Type
University Position	Demographic Information	MC
Department Affiliation	Demographic Information	MC
Years of Experience as a Faculty Member	Demographic Information	MC
Do you have any previous experience as a faculty member at other colleges/universities?	Demographic Information	MC
Do you currently teach any courses with key assessment assignments or plan to in the future?	Demographic Information	MC
Race	Demographic Information	MC
Gender	Demographic Information	MC
The onboarding process that I went through in my first year as a faculty member was/has been beneficial.	Experiences— Onboarding/Support	LS

Survey Item	Survey Item Category	Item Response Type
I have a firm understanding of all my responsibilities/duties as an early career faculty member.	Experiences— Responsibilities/Duties	LS
I feel prepared to handle all my responsibilities/duties as an early career faculty member.	Experiences— Responsibilities/Duties	LS
I often feel overwhelmed with all the responsibilities/duties that I am faced with as an early career faculty member.	Experiences— Responsibilities/Duties	LS
I feel that I should have more responsibilities/duties as an early career faculty member than I do now.	Experiences— Responsibilities/Duties	LS
There are many resources available through the college and/or university in supporting me in the early years of my faculty career.	Experiences— Onboarding/Support	LS
Please select your level of familiarity with your program’s annual assessment plan process.	Experiences—Assessment	LS
Please select your level of familiarity with your program’s accreditation requirements. (including CAEP, CACREP (for Counselor Education), Specialized Professional Associations, etc.)	Experiences—Accreditation	LS
Please select your level of involvement with your program’s annual assessment plan submissions.	Experiences—Assessment	LS
Please select your level of involvement with your program’s accreditation processes. (including CAEP, CACREP (for Counselor Education), Specialized Professional Associations, etc.)	Experiences—Accreditation	LS
Please select your level of interest in being more involved in the assessment and accreditation processes for your program.	Interest/Benefits-Assessment and Accreditation	LS
The Office of Assessment and Accreditation is considering implementing a technology-based task management system in the college that would provide training videos, project lists, and tasks to be completed that involve assessment and accreditation	Interest/Experiences- Technology	LS

Survey Item	Survey Item Category	Item Response Type
for each program and faculty/staff member involved in these processes. Please select your level of interest in using a system like this.		
I believe being involved in work related to assessment and accreditation at the beginning of my faculty career would be beneficial.	Interest/Benefits-Assessment and Accreditation	LS
I believe the work related to assessment and accreditation should mostly be the responsibility of the program coordinator.	Interest/Benefits-Assessment and Accreditation	LS
Email is my preferred method of receiving important information from others at the college.	Interest/Experiences-Technology	LS
I often feel overwhelmed with the number of emails that I receive daily.	Interest/Experiences-Technology	LS
I prefer virtual trainings over in-person trainings when possible.	Interest/Experiences-Technology	LS
If you attended training sessions related to assessment, which of the following would you like to be a part of this training? (Select all that apply.)	Experiences—Training	MC
How would you prefer that training on assessment and accreditation be delivered if it were offered? Rate each option according to the following scale. (group workshop, print guide or workbook, website, interactive PowerPoint, one-on-one hands on training, webinar, other (specify))	Experiences—Training	LS
Describe the onboarding process that you went through in your first year as a faculty member. In this description, include some of the strengths of this process and what you would improve.	Open-Ended Questions	FR
What are some of your primary responsibilities/duties as an early career faculty member?	Open-Ended Questions	FR
Which responsibility/duty do you feel that you are the most prepared in as an early career faculty member and why?	Open-Ended Questions	FR

Survey Item	Survey Item Category	Item Response Type
Which responsibility/duty do you feel that you are the least prepared in as an early career faculty member and why?	Open-Ended Questions	FR
Describe the supports that you have received in preparing you for these responsibilities/duties. (For example, mentoring, trainings, etc.)	Open-Ended Questions	FR
If you could, what additional supports would you like to receive to better prepare you for all your responsibilities/duties as a faculty member?	Open-Ended Questions	FR
How could the Office of Assessment and Accreditation better support programs (and you as an early career faculty member) in the areas of assessment and accreditation?	Open-Ended Questions	FR
Please list any additional comments or suggestions that may be helpful related to your experiences and thoughts on assessment and accreditation and/or your role and responsibilities as an early career faculty member.	Open-Ended Questions	FR

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Key: FR – free response; LS – Five-Level Likert Scale; MC – Multiple Choice

## Focus Group

I conducted a focus group with all six participants following the survey distribution. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) explain, “Perhaps the most unique characteristic of focus group research is the interactive discussion through which data are generated, which leads to a different type of data not accessible through individual interviews” (p. 114). With the use of a focus group, the participants were able to discuss their views and perceptions while also hearing from others, allowing them to further refine and share their thoughts through this collaborative process. The focus group lasted 1 hour in a



virtual Zoom setting. I took notes and recorded the session. I provided each participant with an explanation of the research and notified them that they were allowed to leave at any point during the focus group, signing an agreement prior to beginning. Following the focus group, I used coding to establish themes during the analysis of data and use this to further guide my semi-structured interview questions. The focus group had seven questions total, aligned with the same key factors of interest from the survey to allow for triangulation of the data:

- The responsibilities given to FYECF
- Level of support given to FYECF
- Knowledge of and level of comfort with the assessment and accreditation processes
- Interest and engagement in assessment and accreditation
- Probable effects of being involved in work related to assessment and accreditation at the beginning of their faculty careers
- Possible influence of a technology-based management system on this work

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Due to the nature of this study, semi-structured interviews to determine the perception of the participants was decided to be the best interview format. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) describe the benefits of this type of interview in qualitative research. “Less-structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways. Your questions thus need to be more open-ended” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 110). These types of interviews were used after the distribution of surveys and

completion of the focus group to determine a better understanding of some of the participants' individual experiences and perceptions, and to seek further clarification from the survey and focus group. The interview questions aligned with the survey and focus group to ensure triangulation of the data. I interviewed two of the participants, reserving 30-minute slots for each session. These two participants were selected based on their responses during the focus group and my desire to gain additional feedback from their perspectives. One of the participants had more knowledge of her program's accreditation process than the others due to her program's assessment practices, so I wanted to give her an opportunity to elaborate on these experiences. Another participant had very little experience in assessment and accreditation but had many ideas for how OAA could further assist FYECF in better understanding these areas, so the semi-structured interview allowed her to elaborate on these thoughts.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

I conducted analysis throughout the study and used the data to further guide my research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed how qualitative data analysis should be a simultaneous process in the research, noting, "The timing of analysis and the integration of analysis with other tasks distinguish a qualitative design from traditional, positivistic research" (p. 195). I used coding through creating categories/themes based on the data from the open-ended surveys, focus group, and semi-structured interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicate, "Coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of data" (p. 199).

I reviewed each interview, the focus group, and all survey responses and added identifying notations during this coding process. I used inductive coding—starting with open coding, then moving to analytical coding, which “goes beyond descriptive coding; it is ‘coding that comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning’” (Richards, 2015, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 206). I also integrated the phenomenological method of reduction by ensuring that my biases did not interfere with my ability to understand the participants’ responses and perspectives: I sought to “focus on experience,” which “‘reduces’ the investigative field to the psychological” (Wertz, 2005, p. 168).

For the data collected from the Likert-scale survey questions, I used descriptive analysis—more specifically, the measures of central tendency: mean, median, and mode. The most appropriate measure was determining the most frequent responses based on my 5-point Likert scale. By determining categories from the data and comparing them to the quantitative results, I triangulated the data to simultaneously understand how the descriptive study answered my research questions.

To ensure trustworthiness and rigor, I planned for adequate engagement with participants through multiple data collection methods during the study. Through a focus group, survey, and interviews, I interacted with the participants at multiple points throughout the study, enabling saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also conducted member checks to ensure that I collected and interpreted accurate data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the focus group, I displayed the notes that I was taking as the participants responded with opportunities for them to share any discrepancies or misinterpretations in real time. I also shared the summary data from the focus group along with the semi-structured interviews to allow for fine-tuning of their perspectives.

## **Summary**

Chapter 3 included a description of my data collection methods and process of analysis, beginning with a rationale for framing the research as a qualitative descriptive study using an action research approach. A description of the sampling plan and research setting followed. Next, I discussed the three sources of qualitative data used to examine the research questions, along with an overview of how the study was to be conducted over 6 weeks. The chapter concluded with the data analysis methods, which focused on coding through creating categories/themes. Chapter 4 presents the findings.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

To combat the issues surrounding morale and productivity relative to assessment and accreditation in the college, this descriptive study aimed to determine the perceptions and needs of FYECF as they interact with OAA in the assessment work that is vital in the continuous improvement and accreditation of their programs. This study sought to understand the responsibilities and level of support given to FYECF, their engagement in and understanding of assessment and accreditation, the probable effects of being more involved in this work at the beginning of their faculty careers, and the possible influence of a technology-based management system on this work.

As I explained in Chapter 3, I collected data through surveys, a focus group, and semi-structured interviews, focusing on key factors of interest aligned with my research questions:

- The responsibilities given to FYECF
- Level of support given to FYECF
- Knowledge of and level of comfort with the assessment and accreditation processes

- Interest and engagement in assessment and accreditation
- Probable effects of being involved in work related to assessment and accreditation at the beginning of their faculty careers
- Possible influence of a technology-based management system on this work

### **Presentation of the Data**

The data below are presented by source of data, starting with a brief explanation of the data collection process, then tables showing the responses, and summaries of information from the tables.

#### **Closed-Response Survey**

I sent the survey at the end of February and closed it after 2 weeks, once all participants were able to complete it. The results from the demographic and Likert Scale questions are presented in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1** University Position

	Number Responding	Percent of Respondents
Assistant Professor	0	0
Associate Professor	0	0
Adjunct Faculty	1	17%
Clinical Faculty	5	83%

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Staff	0	0
Other	0	0

As Table 4.1 indicates, the majority of the respondents were clinical faculty members, which mirrors the largest population of new COE faculty. Although a few tenure-track faculty were in their first years at the college, many were not in programs that undergo accreditation and the few who were declined to participate in this study.

**Table 4.2** Department Affiliation

	Number Responding	Percent of Respondents
EDST	2	33%
ITE	2	33%
PEDU	1	17%
EDLP	1	17%
Other	0	0

Of the four COE departments, the largest is ITE, and the smallest is PEDU. As Table 4.2 illustrates, two faculty each in EDST and ITE, and one each in PEDU and EDLP, participated in the study.

**Table 4.3** Previous Faculty Experience

	Number Responding	Percent of Respondents
Yes	0	0
No	6	100%

I wanted to ensure that participants were FYECF to receive the appropriate information for this particular study, and Table 4.3 indicates that 100% of the sample had not held previous faculty positions at other colleges.

**Table 4.4** Do you currently teach any courses with key assessment assignments or plan to in the future?

	Number Responding	Percent of Respondents
Yes	6	100%
No	0	0

As Table 4.4 demonstrates, all the participants were responsible for teaching courses that contain key assessment assignments, which means that they must collect and submit data for these assignments as part of their program’s assessment plans and accreditation reports.

**Table 4.5:** Years of Experience as a Faculty Member

	Number Responding	Percent of Respondents
1	3	50%
2	2	33%
3	1	17%
4+	0	0

As Table 4.5 shows, half of the participants were in their first year as faculty members, while two were in their second year, and one in their third year. This ensured that I had a mixture of experience levels in my sample.



**Table 4.6:** To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Survey Item	% Strongly Disagree	% Somewhat Disagree	% Neither agree nor disagree	% Somewhat Agree	% Strongly Agree
The onboarding process that I went through in my first year as a faculty member was/has been beneficial.	33%	67%	-	-	-
I have a firm understanding of all my responsibilities/duties as an early career faculty member.	-	17%	33%	50%	-
I feel prepared to handle all my responsibilities/duties as an early career faculty member.	-	-	17%	83%	-
I often feel overwhelmed with all the responsibilities/duties that I am faced with as an early career faculty member.	-	33%	33%	33%	-
I feel that I should have more responsibilities/duties as an early career faculty member than I do now.	33%	50%	-	17%	-
There are many resources available through the college and/or university in supporting me in the early years of my faculty career.	17%	67%	17%	-	-
I believe being involved in work related to assessment and accreditation at the beginning of my faculty career would be beneficial.	-	-	-	50%	50%
I believe the work related to assessment and accreditation should mostly be the responsibility of the program coordinator.	17%	67%	-	17%	-
Email is my preferred method of receiving important information from others at the college.	-	-	-	-	100%
I often feel overwhelmed with the number of emails that I receive daily.	-	33%	17%	50%	-
I prefer virtual trainings over in-person trainings when possible.	-	33%	-	50%	17%

**Table 4.6 Summary Data**

The Likert-scale questions above measured the participants' perceptions of their involvement and experience with onboarding, assessment, accreditation, and technology.

Data from the survey responses in Table 4.6 indicate that:

- 100% of participants strongly or somewhat disagreed that the on-boarding process in their first year as a faculty member was/has been beneficial.
- 84% strongly or somewhat disagreed that there are many resources available through the college and/or university in supporting them in the early years of their faculty career.
- 83% somewhat agree that they feel prepared to handle all their responsibilities/duties as an early career faculty member.
- 83% somewhat or strongly disagreed that they should have more responsibilities/duties as an early career faculty member than they do now.
- 100% somewhat or strongly agreed that being involved in work related to assessment and accreditation at the beginning of their faculty career would be beneficial.
- 83% somewhat or strongly disagreed that the work related to assessment and accreditation should mostly be the responsibility of the program coordinator.
- 100% agreed that email is their preferred method of receiving important information, while 50% somewhat agreed that they often feel overwhelmed with the number of emails that they receive daily.
- 67% of participants somewhat or strongly agreed that they prefer virtual trainings over in-person trainings, when possible, while 33% somewhat disagreed.

**Table 4.7:** Levels of Familiarity

Survey Item	% Not Familiar at All	% Slightly Familiar	% Moderately Familiar	% Very Familiar	% Extremely Familiar
Please select your level of familiarity with your program's annual assessment plan process.	50%	33%	-	17%	-
Please select your level of familiarity with your program's accreditation requirements. (including CAEP, CACREP (for Counselor Education), Specialized Professional Associations, etc.)	50%	33%	-	17%	-

Because one participant was very familiar with their program's assessment plan process and accreditation requirements, I selected them for a semi-structured interview to obtain more information. The other five participants were either not familiar at all or slightly familiar with these processes (Table 4.7).

**Table 4.8:** Levels of Involvement

Survey Item	% Unsure	% Not Involved at All	% Slightly Involved	% Moderately Involved	% Very Involved
Please select your level of involvement with your program's annual assessment plan submissions.	50%	-	17%	33%	-
Please select your level of involvement with your program's accreditation processes. (including CAEP, CACREP (for Counselor Education), Specialized Professional Associations, etc.)	33%	-	33%	33%	-

Three participants were unsure of their involvement with their program's annual assessment plan submissions, while the other half were either slightly or moderately

involved. Four of the participants (67%) were slightly or moderately involved in their program’s accreditation processes, while the other two (33%) were unsure (Table 4.8).

**Table 4.9:** Levels of Interest

Survey Item	% Not Interested at All	% Slightly Interested	% Moderately Interested	% Very Interested	% Extremely Interested
Please select your level of interest in being more involved in the assessment and accreditation processes for your program.	-	-	67%	33%	-
The Office of Assessment and Accreditation is considering implementing a technology-based task management system in the college that would provide training videos, project lists, and tasks to be completed that involve assessment and accreditation for each program and faculty/staff member involved in these processes. Please select your level of interest in using a system like this.	-	-	17%	83%	-

All the participants were either moderately or very interested in being more involved in the assessment and accreditation processes for their programs (Table 4.9). All the participants were also moderately or very interested in using a technology-based task management system in the college.

**Table 4.10:** How would you prefer that training on assessment and accreditation be delivered if it were offered? Rate each option according to the following scale.

Survey Item	% Do Not Prefer	% Prefer Slightly	% Prefer a moderate amount	% Prefer a lot	% Prefer a great deal
Group workshop	-	17%	-	67%	17%
Print guide or workbook	17%	33%	-	33%	-
Website	50%	17%	33%	-	-
Interactive PowerPoint	-	33%	-	67%	-
One-on-one hands on training	-	-	-	50%	50%
Webinar	17%	-	-	33%	50%
Other (specify)	-	-	-	-	-

Based on the responses in Table 4.10, most participants preferred the idea of a group workshop, one-on-one hands-on training, or a webinar for receiving training on assessment and accreditation. As a result, a multi-platform approach may be warranted.

**Table 4.11:** If you attended training sessions related to assessment, which of the following would you like to be a part of this training? (Select all that apply.)

	Number Selected	Percent of Respondents
creating rubrics for assignments	4	67%
establishing & aligning learning outcomes	5	83%
gathering data	3	50%
using the Chalk & Wire system (submitting and assessing assignments)	4	67%

summarizing data/results	2	33%
analyzing data/using results for future improvement	2	33%
other (specify)	0	0
not interested in receiving training related to assessment	0	0

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Based on the responses in Table 4.11, the most popular selection was establishing and aligning learning outcomes with 83% of the respondents interested. About 67% of the participants were interested in trainings on using the Chalk & Wire system and creating rubrics for assessments. Chalk & Wire is a system that the college uses to collect key assessment data across the college, which OAA staff manage for the entire COE.

**Open-Response Survey Items**

The survey also included eight open-response items. Upon completion of the survey, I began sorting the results into themes, as presented in Table 4.12.

**Table 4.12** Emergent Themes Frequency Table – Open-Response Items

	<i>N</i> = 6
Onboarding Process	Did not receive any onboarding – formal or informal – 50%
	Onboarding was little to nothing – 33%
	Program coordinator was my only resource – 17%

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Primary Responsibilities and Duties	<i>N</i> = 6 Teaching & program/department/college service – 50% Teaching & program administrative duties – 33% Teaching & key assessment data collection – 17%
Preparedness for Responsibilities and Duties (Most Prepared)	<i>N</i> = 6 Teaching due to prior experience – 100%
Preparedness for Responsibilities and Duties (Least Prepared)	<i>N</i> = 6 All the aspects/ins & outs of higher education – 33% Service/understanding committee work – 33% Blackboard/having to build courses from scratch – 33%
Supports Provided	<i>N</i> = 6 Informal mentors – 83% Program coordinator – 17%
Supports Needed	<i>N</i> = 6 A clear set of expectations – 33% Having a formal, set, willing mentor – 67%
Needed Support from Office of Assessment and Accreditation	<i>N</i> = 6 Providing trainings, especially online options – 33% Visibility and connection to better understand what the office does – 33% Providing clear directions/guidance on how faculty fit into this work – 33%
Additional Thoughts	<i>N</i> =1 “I work mostly remotely and paired with the pandemic, I have not had a lot of time on campus.”

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## Focus Group Findings

The focus group took place virtually in mid-March, included all six participants, and lasted approximately 60 minutes. Table 4.13 summarizes the themes from the conversation.

**Table 4.13** Emergent Themes Frequency Table – Focus Group

Primary Responsibilities/Duties	<p><i>N</i>= 6</p> <p>Teaching &amp; program/department/college service – 50%</p> <p>Teaching &amp; program administrative duties – 33%</p> <p>Teaching &amp; key assessment data collection – 17%</p>
Preparedness for Responsibilities and Duties (Most Prepared)	<p><i>N</i>= 6</p> <p>Teaching due to prior experience – 100%</p>
Preparedness for Responsibilities and Duties (Least Prepared)	<p><i>N</i>= 6</p> <p>All the aspects/ins &amp; outs of higher education – 33%</p> <p>Service/understanding committee work – 33%</p> <p>Blackboard/having to build courses from scratch – 33%</p>
Supports Provided	<p><i>N</i>= 6</p> <p>Informal mentors – 83%</p> <p>Program coordinator – 17%</p>
Supports Provided (Most Helpful)	<p><i>N</i>= 6</p> <p>Informal mentors – 67%</p> <p>Program coordinator – 17%</p> <p>IT Support – 17%</p>
Supports Needed	<p><i>N</i>= 6</p> <p>Better onboarding – 33%</p> <p>Clear and concise description of my job – 33%</p> <p>Having a formal, set, willing mentor – 33%</p>
Involvement in Program's Accreditation Processes	<p><i>N</i>= 6</p> <p>Very involved with program's accreditation both as a student and now faculty member – 17%</p> <p>Have heard of them before &amp; collect key assessment data – 67%</p> <p>Served on a CAEP Panel – 17%</p>



Involvement in Program's Assessment Processes	<p><i>N=6</i>          No involvement or knowledge of that – 50%          Aware of key assessments – 33%          Pretty knowledgeable, I know that I have the ability to change key assessments and rubrics as needed – 17%</p>
Potential Benefits of Involvement with Assessment and Accreditation	<p><i>N=6</i>          Knowing more about the big picture of accreditation – see how the pieces fit together and how your students are performing – 83%          Having a better understanding of what I am responsible for in relation to assessment &amp; accreditation – 17%</p>
Needed Support from Office of Assessment and Accreditation	<p><i>N=6</i>          Becoming part of the onboarding process/providing documents for faculty as they are hired - 33%          Provide trainings for faculty – webinars or in-person option – 50%          Scheduled times to come to faculty or program meetings once a year – 17%</p>
Additional Thoughts	<p><i>N=4</i>          Would like more exposure to assessment and accreditation, but I am glad more is not on my plate right now – 25%          Relationship building – getting together socially and better understanding each office in the COE – 50%          The opportunity for exposure to assessment and accreditation in the first year would be helpful, with being more active in later years – 25%</p>

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## **Interview Findings**

The individual interviews took place during the final 2 weeks of March, after the focus group, providing time to determine the additional questions that I would ask of the participants from whom I wanted to gather additional information related to the emerging themes. Based on survey and focus group data, I decided to interview two participants. One of the participants, a clinical faculty member in her second year whom I will identify as Hannah, had more knowledge of her program's accreditation process and shared that

one of their program’s faculty members keeps them continuously updated regarding how each of their courses fit into the program’s assessment plan. Based on this information and her ideas shared during the focus group, I wanted to give her an opportunity to elaborate on these experiences and thoughts. Her responses are in Table 4.14.

**Table 4.14** Semi-Structured Interview I Responses

<p>1. Could you further explain your onboarding process and the supports you were given during your first year as a clinical faculty member?</p>	<p>“Since I already knew my faculty and the program really well as a student that went to conferences with faculty, taught and took courses, and knew our format and processes, I did not have a formalized onboarding process. I was also hired during COVID- I thought this was why I didn’t receive any sort of formal mentoring or onboarding. I know that others that I work with that are tenure-track would talk about trainings or workshops that they were attending, but I was never offered any of these, so I was hoping that I was not missing something because of the timeframe that I was hired and the fact that I already knew the program so well.”</p>
<p>2. You shared that you would like more exposure to assessment and accreditation but are glad more is not being put on your plate right now. Do you believe that you would have the time and interest to participate in more of this work?</p>	<p>“I don’t believe that I would have a lot of extra time to dedicate to assessment and accreditation (such as taking on the lead role in our data collection or writing self-studies), but I would certainly have time to participate in trainings, learn more about the big picture of accreditation, and participate in writing assessment plans...I believe that this could help me in the long run and ensure that my rubrics are sufficient and that I know how to analyze the data that I am collecting...also to learn how this all feeds into the big picture and how I can change what I am doing or my rubrics in the future.”</p>
<p>3. Outside of teaching, what are some of your other responsibilities as an early career faculty member that you mentioned during the focus group?</p>	<p>“Since I am clinical, teaching is my primary focus, but I also attend conferences, work on research with other faculty members, and serve on committees in the college. I supervise students also as part of my teaching load, and attend program meetings and train our site supervisors.”</p>

4. You shared that you are very involved with your program's accreditation both as a student and now as a faculty member – could you elaborate on this?

“We have been working on self-studies and addendums for our program's accreditation for the past several years, and we have a liaison in our program that keeps us updated with the standards, what we need to do, and I know that I have the freedom to change my rubrics for key assessments if I need to. All of the faculty in our program collect key assessment data for our accreditation, and even as a student teaching graduate level courses in the program, I was responsible for collecting this data, so I had a pretty good understanding of it, but I know there is a lot that I do not know. I know that we submit assessment plans annually, but I don't know much about that process other than making sure my data is in Chalk & Wire.”

5. What are some specific ways that the Office of Assessment and Accreditation could better support programs (and you as an early career faculty member) in the areas of assessment and accreditation?

“As I have mentioned before, I would be really interested in learning more about the big picture – when new faculty start, having information from OAA would be helpful to know exactly how we fit into this process, what OAA is along with other offices in the college, and how we can use these resources. There are so many offices and resources in the college that I really don't know that much about. Knowing who to reach out to if we have questions, who can help us with this and that, all of that would be so great for faculty that are just starting.”

6. What are your thoughts on how a technology-based management system with integrated trainings could assist in your exposure to assessment and accreditation?

“I would be interested to learn more about this – I would like to attend trainings with an in-person option because I know that if I was sent a webinar link or something like that, I would probably not click on it since I am busy with other things, and it is not a pressing issue for me. If there was a system like this that could keep me informed and on track that I could use when needed, that would be great. I would still like some in-person options, but I know that we wouldn't all be able to attend them at the same time, so maybe having both options available.”

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Another participant, a first-year clinical faculty member whom I will identify as Alex, shared that she had very little experience in assessment and accreditation but started to share many ideas for how OAA could further assist FYECF in better

understanding these areas, so I wanted to give her an opportunity to elaborate on these thoughts based on her experiences during this first year as a clinical faculty member. Her responses are in Table 4.15.

**Table 4.15** Semi-Structured Interview II Responses

Could you further explain your onboarding process and the supports you were given during your first year as a clinical faculty member?

“Onboarding was very hands-off, I didn't do training on what I thought that I would – I took a lot of sexual harassment training but I didn't learn much about the logistics at first – in my department, the whole hiring process took forever. There was also a lack on onboarding on the university's part due to Blackboard – I had to teach myself a lot of this and reached out to IT for help. If I had received a very clear and concise job description, it would have been really helpful – it is all new, but if you tell me the expectations, I will go above and beyond that.”

You shared that you have many administrative duties in your role. Could you elaborate on this and any other responsibilities that you have as an early career faculty member outside of teaching?

“So this is something that I am constantly figuring out. With me being so new, I am teaching courses which takes up most of my time but also taking on a lot of the administrative duties in my program such as keeping track of interns, managing action plans, working on our field packet, and more things as they come up. My mentor (she is informal, but has been training me along the way all year) has been phenomenal and has taken on a very hands-on approach– she holds the entire program together and has helped me so much. I have been very comfortable with all of the teaching aspects of my job with my previous experience as a classroom teacher and literacy coach, but learning all of the ins and outs of higher ed has been the biggest challenge and all of the behind the scenes work that I didn't know when I was an undergrad in the college.”

You shared that you would like more exposure to assessment and accreditation because you are responsible for collecting key assessment data but have very little knowledge of these processes – in what ways would you like to be more exposed to these areas and do you believe you would have time to take on more responsibilities? What are some specific ways that the Office of Assessment and Accreditation could better support programs (and you as an early career faculty member) in the areas of assessment and accreditation?

What are your thoughts on how a technology-based management system with integrated trainings could assist in your exposure to assessment and accreditation?

“Like I mentioned before, the only thing that I really know about our accreditation is that we have certain key assessments that we have to collect data for and I have to enter this data into Chalk & Wire – I don’t know much else and would really like to learn more about the big picture. Learning more about the office [OAA] and our accreditor and what we need to do. Although I am busy, this is something that I think would be important to learn about especially during the first year – I want to know that what I am doing is right and what I can do to make it better for my students and our accreditation.” (1a, 1b, 3a)

“Offering big picture trainings, teaching more about Chalk & Wire and our rubrics and key assessments, giving out information on who to reach for what if we need help or have questions. This could even be part of the onboarding process – a document that is clearly defined what I need to do, what my role is with this. I would love to meet other people and meet in-person if possible, but given a virtual option would be great too.”

“I think this could be helpful. I would love to meet other people and meet in-person if possible and you can get more out of in-person trainings, but given a virtual option would be great too, so you can go back to it if you need to. As an instructor, I need to know that I need to watch for that and I don't know enough about the process to be watchful of those things.”

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### **General Findings and Results Based on Themes**

The following section includes general findings based on an analysis of the data, sorted into themes derived from the three data sources. Throughout the study, I analyzed data informally, with themes starting to form after the initial survey, reinforced during the focus group, and finalized after the semi-structured interview sessions, when I sorted all data into three overall themes. Figure 4.1 presents these themes as well as the more specific subthemes.

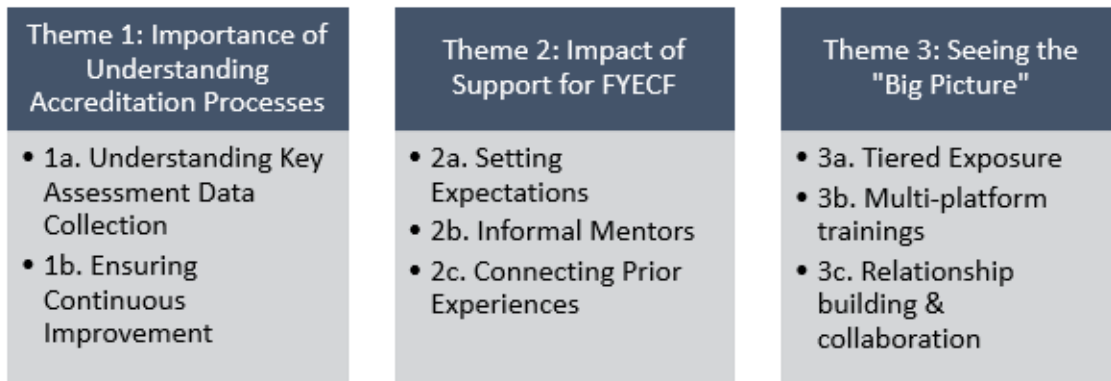


Figure 4.1 Themes and Subthemes

### **Theme 1: Importance of Understanding Accreditation Processes**

Although only one participant identified as being very familiar with her program's assessment plan process and accreditation requirements while the others were either not familiar at all or slightly familiar, all the participants shared that they were responsible for collecting key assessment data for their programs each semester. These early career faculty must fully understand how to properly collect these data and how this process fits into their programs' accreditation. Throughout the focus group and semi-structured interviews, participants shared their thoughts on the importance of having a better understanding of their program's accreditation processes because of this required involvement in key assessment data collection and their goals of wanting to understand how their data fit into their program's assessment plans and overall continuous improvement. Two subthemes summarized the participants' feedback: understanding key assessment data collection and ensuring continuous improvement.

### *Theme 1a: Understanding Key Assessment Data Collection*

Data from the survey demonstrated that all the participants were either moderately or very interested in being more involved in the assessment and accreditation processes for their programs. Four of the participants were slightly or moderately involved in their program's accreditation processes, while the other two were unsure. Three participants were unsure of their involvement with their program's annual assessment plan submissions, while the other half were either slightly or moderately involved. Within the focus group, 50% stated that they had "no involvement or knowledge of that [annual assessment plan submissions]", while 33% were just aware of key assessments, but not how they fit into the submission process. When asked to elaborate in an individual interview, Alex said, "As an instructor, I need to know that I need to watch for that and I don't know enough about the process to be watchful of those things." She also added:

All of the faculty in our program collect key assessment data for our accreditation, and even as a student teaching graduate level courses in the program, I was responsible for collecting this data, so I had a pretty good understanding of it, but I know there is a lot that I do not know. I know that we submit assessment plans annually, but I don't know much about that process other than making sure my data is in Chalk & Wire.

Similar comments during the focus group led to the subtheme of ensuring continuous improvement. Although most of the participants' experiences with accreditation and assessment plan submissions were based on collecting key assessment data, they all expressed their interest in being more involved early in their careers and the benefits such involvement could provide.

### ***Theme 1b: Ensuring Continuous Improvement***

Data from the survey revealed that 100% of the FYECF somewhat or strongly agreed that being involved in work related to assessment and accreditation at the beginning of their faculty career would be beneficial. About 83% somewhat or strongly disagreed that the work related to assessment and accreditation should mostly be the responsibility of the program coordinator. Focus group data elaborated on this result, with 83% responding that some of the benefits of this work would be knowing more about the big picture of accreditation, seeing how the pieces fit together and how your students are performing. Alex elaborated during the interview by saying:

Although I am busy, this is something that I think would be important to learn about especially during the first year – I want to know that what I am doing is right and what I can do to make it better for my students and our accreditation.

Hannah added similar thoughts by saying:

I would certainly have time to participate in trainings, learn more about the big picture of accreditation, and participate in writing assessment plans...I believe that this could help me in the long run and ensure that my rubrics are sufficient and that I know how to analyze the data that I am collecting...also to learn how this all feeds into the big picture and how I can change what I am doing or my rubrics in the future.

The participants' willingness to engage in work related to assessment and accreditation to obtain a better understanding of the overall processes to guide future improvement shows



their commitment to continuous improvement in their programs, and how they can be a part of these practices.

## **Theme 2: Impact of Support for FYECF**

Data from all three sources showed that the participants felt the most prepared to teach since they all started in the college with previous experience as a classroom teacher or as an instructor in a doctoral program. When asked about other duties, the participants cited their involvement in committee work, administrative duties for their programs, college service, and key assessment data collection. As described in the subthemes that follow, these areas outside of teaching were the main areas in which all of the participants agreed more formalized support, especially during the first year and in onboarding, would be helpful. Three subthemes summarized the participants' feedback regarding the impact of support for FYECF: setting expectations, informal mentors, and connecting prior experiences.

### ***Theme 2a: Setting Expectations***

Through data collected from the survey and focus group, one alarming theme continued to arise in that 100% of the participants agreed that the on-boarding process was not/has not been beneficial. In the focus group, 50% revealed that they did not receive any onboarding (formal or informal), 33% added that their onboarding experience was "little to nothing," and 17% added that their program coordinator was "their only resource." Alex added to this discussion during her interview:

Onboarding was very hands-off, I didn't do training on what I thought that I would – I took a lot of sexual harassment training but I didn't learn much about

the logistics at first – in my department, the whole hiring process took forever.

There was also a lack of onboarding on the university's part due to Blackboard – I had to teach myself a lot of this and reached out to IT for help. If I had received a very clear and concise job description, it would have been really helpful – it is all new, but if you tell me the expectations, I will go above and beyond that.

Hannah added in her interview as well by saying:

Since I already knew my faculty and the program really well as a student that went to conferences with faculty, taught and took courses, and knew our format and processes, I did not have a formalized onboarding process. I was also hired during COVID- I thought this was why I didn't receive any sort of formal mentoring or onboarding. I know that others that I work with that are tenure-track would talk about trainings or workshops that they were attending, but I was never offered any of these, so I was hoping that I was not missing something because of the timeframe that I was hired and the fact that I already knew the program so well.

Survey data revealed that 84% strongly or somewhat disagreed that there are many resources available through the college and/or university in supporting them in the early years of their faculty career. When asked about additional supports that they would like to better prepare them for their responsibilities/duties as a faculty member, survey data showed that 33% would like a clear set of expectations, while 67% would like to have a formal, set, and willing mentor. Focus group data were similar, showing that 33% would like better onboarding, 33% would like to receive a clear and concise description of their job, and 33% would like to have a formal, set, and willing mentor. All these data reveal

that the early career faculty involved with this study agree that setting clear expectations on all their job requirements through a formalized process with easily accessible resources would be helpful in the preparation for their roles and responsibilities.

***Theme 2b: Informal Mentors***

Across data collected from the survey, focus group, and interviews, another theme that continued to arise was the importance of informal mentors in preparing the faculty for their roles and responsibilities. The survey and focus group both revealed that 83% of participants found their informal mentors to be the most beneficial support that they received in preparing them for their role as a faculty member. Alex shared that her program coordinator and IT support were the most helpful supports that she received during her first year. She further described this dynamic in her informal interview by clarifying that her program coordinator is also her informal mentor:

My mentor (she is informal but has been training me along the way all year) has been phenomenal and has taken on a very hands-on approach. She holds the entire program together and has helped me so much.

When asked about additional supports that they would like to better prepare them for their responsibilities/duties as a faculty member, 67% of survey respondents indicated interest in a formal, set, and willing mentor. One participant further described this desire during the focus group:

I work mostly remotely and paired with the pandemic; I have not had a lot of time on campus. I was placed with an informal mentor, but this person told me that

they were not getting paid extra for this and that it was not part of their job description. So, a willing and formal mentor would have helped me tremendously. All the participants agreed that the college lacked a formal mentoring process in place for clinical and adjunct faculty, but they understood how important mentorship could be for helping to prepare early faculty.

### ***Theme 2c: Connecting Prior Experiences***

Survey data indicated that 83% of participants somewhat agreed that they feel prepared to handle all their responsibilities/duties as an early career faculty member, while 100% agreed that teaching was the area that they felt most prepared for due to their prior experiences. The participants shared that they are all also involved in committee work, administrative duties for their programs, program/department/college service, and key assessment data collection. Hannah further described her responsibilities in her interview by adding:

Since I am clinical, teaching is my primary focus, but I also attend conferences, work on research with other faculty members, and serve on committees in the college. I supervise students also as part of my teaching load and attend program meetings and train our site supervisors.

Similarly, Alex said:

With me being so new, I am teaching courses which takes up most of my time but also taking on a lot of the administrative duties in my program such as keeping track of interns, managing action plans, working on our field packet, and more things as they come up.

She also added:

I have been very comfortable with all of the teaching aspects of my job with my previous experience as a classroom teacher and literacy coach but learning all of the ins and outs of higher ed has been the biggest challenge and all of the behind the scenes work that I didn't know when I was an undergrad in the college.

Focus group data disclosed three main areas where the participants felt least prepared as FYECF: all the aspects/ins and outs of higher education, service/understanding committee work, and Blackboard/having to build courses from scratch. Implementing supports that include formal mentors and onboarding processes within these areas would prepare new faculty for all aspects of their new roles in higher education, based on these responses.

### **Theme 3: “Seeing the Big Picture”**

Through the data collection processes of open-ended survey, focus group, and interviews, one theme continuously emerged of the participants' wanting to “see the big picture” regarding assessment and accreditation. Hannah shared during her interview:

I would be really interested in learning more about the big picture – when new faculty start, having information from OAA would be helpful to know exactly how we fit into this process, what OAA is along with other offices in the college, and how we can use these resources.

Alex shared a similar stance by stating:

the only thing that I really know about our accreditation is that we have certain key assessments that we have to collect data for and I have to enter this data into Chalk & Wire – I don't know much else and would really like to learn more about the big picture.

These insightful responses in conjunction with data collection from the open-ended responses and focus group led to three subthemes in this category: tiered exposure, multi-platform trainings, and relationship building and collaboration.

### ***Theme 3a: Tiered Exposure***

Survey data indicated that 83% of the participants somewhat or strongly disagreed that they should have more responsibilities/duties as FYECF. When asked if they often felt overwhelmed by all their duties and responsibilities in their faculty roles, the responses were divided with 33% somewhat agreeing, 33% somewhat disagreeing, and 33% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Focus group data were also reflective of this finding, with one participant sharing, “I would like more exposure to assessment and accreditation, but I am glad more is not on my plate right now.” When asked to explain during the interview, Hannah shared:

I don't believe that I would have a lot of extra time to dedicate to assessment and accreditation (such as taking on the lead role in our data collection or writing self-studies), but I would certainly have time to participate in trainings, learn more about the big picture of accreditation, and participate in writing assessment plans...

Another focus group participant shared, “The opportunity for exposure to assessment and accreditation in the first year would be helpful, with being more active in later years.”

Alex added to these comments in her interview by sharing:

Although I am busy, this [assessment and accreditation] is something that I think would be important to learn about especially during the first year – I want to know that what I am doing is right and what I can do to make it better for my students and our accreditation.

When asked how OAA could better support them in the areas of assessment and accreditation, participants shared ideas in the open-response item of the survey, such as “providing trainings, especially online options,” “visibility and connection to better understand what the office does,” and “providing clear directions/guidance on how faculty fit into this work.” During the focus group, half of the participants agreed that providing trainings for faculty with both webinar and in-person options would be helpful, while the others agreed that becoming part of the onboarding process and providing documents for faculty as they are hired would be ideal. When asked further about what types of trainings that they would like to receive based on assessment and accreditation, survey data revealed that the most popular selection was establishing and aligning learning outcomes with 83% of the respondents interested. About 67% of the participants were interested in trainings on using the Chalk & Wire system and creating rubrics for assessments.

Based on these responses, taking a tiered approach to engaging early career faculty in work related to assessment and accreditation would be ideal, with exposing them to the information in the early years, then getting them more involved later. The

participants were most interested in “seeing the big picture” during these early years and engaging in trainings related to better understanding OAA’s work and their connections to this work within key assessment data collection.

***Theme 3b: Multi-Platform Trainings***

Survey data revealed that 67% of participants somewhat or strongly agreed that they prefer virtual trainings over in-person trainings, when possible, while 33% somewhat disagreed. Alex elaborated during her interview by saying,

I would love to meet other people and meet in-person if possible and you can get more out of in-person trainings, but given a virtual option would be great too, so you can go back to it if you need to.

Hannah somewhat agreed by saying,

I would like to attend trainings with an in-person option because I know that if I was sent a webinar link or something like that, I would probably not click on it since I am busy with other things, and it is not a pressing issue for me.

Survey data revealed that most of the participants preferred the idea of a group workshop, one-on-one hands-on training, or a webinar for receiving training on assessment and accreditation.

All the participants were also moderately or very interested in using a technology-based task management system in the college. Hannah expanded during the interview by saying:



I would be interested to learn more about this...If there was a system like this that could keep me informed and on track that I could use when needed, that would be great. I would still like some in-person options, but I know that we wouldn't all be able to attend them at the same time, so maybe having both options available.

Based on these responses, a multi-platform approach may be warranted, giving the participants an in-person option for attendance. All the participants showed interest in a technology-based task management system with built-in trainings included, but their interest in relationship building and the collaborative aspects of in-person trainings should also be considered, leading to the next subtheme.

### ***Theme 3c: Relationship Building & Collaboration***

Another theme that continued to appear throughout data collection was the idea of how learning more about this work could also present an opportunity for collaboration and relationship building with others across the college. During the focus group, all participants agreed that hosting events to learn more about OAA and other offices across the college would be helpful. One participant shared, "Socially we could get to know each other better if something like this was hosted at least annually. We could learn about each office, ask questions, and find out what resources are available in the college."

Hannah also agreed during her interview by saying,

There are so many offices and resources in the college that I really don't know that much about. Knowing who to reach out to if we have questions, who can help us with this and that, all of that would be so great for faculty that are just starting.

Another participant suggested that OAA should have scheduled times to come to faculty or program meetings once a year to keep all faculty updated on the office's work and how this affects each of the programs. Alex added during her interview after she was asked how OAA could better serve faculty,

Offering big picture trainings, teaching more about Chalk & Wire and our rubrics and key assessments, giving out information on who to reach for what if we need help or have questions. This could even be part of the onboarding process.

The participants' responses surrounding this subtheme further show that a multi-platform approach to exposing early career faculty to this work could be beneficial, echoing McAvoy et al.'s (2021) finding that "Socialization, training and on-boarding all play an important role in the long-term success of the faculty member and, consequently, the organization" (p. 1). Engaging in processes that allow socialization along with training that includes assessment and accreditation practices could encourage the long-term success of the new faculty and, in turn, the long-term success of OAA and its work.

### **Analysis of Data Based on Research Questions**

The themes identified in this chapter each support various aspects of the research questions. This section presents each research question with a summary of how each of the themes are represented.

#### **Research Question 1**

All the participants shared that their main responsibility was teaching, the area where they felt most prepared due to their prior experiences. In addition to teaching, they are also involved in committee work, administrative duties for their programs, college

service, and key assessment data collection. Each found that informal mentors were their greatest support, even though some wished that their mentors were more willing, and all thought that having a formal mentoring process would be beneficial. One participant shared that IT and Blackboard support was also extremely helpful in her first year. The three main areas that the participants felt least prepared for as FYECF were all the aspects of higher education, understanding service committee work responsibilities, and building courses through Blackboard. The participants were not aware of all the supports available throughout the college and university that may be available for early career faculty.

### **Research Question 2**

All the participants were involved in their program's assessment and accreditation processes on a small-scale level through key assessment data collection, while some had participated in interview sessions for their accreditation reviews and discussions with their faculty about assessment data. Half of the participants were unsure of their involvement level with their program's annual assessment plan submissions, while the other half were either slightly or moderately involved. Apart from one participant, the others expressed that their understanding of these areas was minimal, but all were interested in being more involved in these processes to ensure that they are engaging in best practice to ensure continuous improvement of their programs.

### **Research Question 3**

All the participants were interested in being more involved in the assessment and accreditation processes for their programs but expressed that such involvement would be

most beneficial if introduced to early career faculty on a tiered level. There were many ways that the participants felt that this could benefit their work at the beginning of their faculty careers, all revolving around key assessment data collection. Through having a better understanding of their programs' assessment practices and accreditation requirements, the participants felt they could ensure their assessment rubrics were sufficient and better understand how to analyze the data they are collecting so that they can make informed changes. They did not feel that they had a lot of extra time to dedicate to this work so early in their careers but having early exposure with more involvement later in their careers would be ideal. Through this early exposure, the participants may potentially have a more positive outlook on assessment and accreditation if they were later tasked with a more active role in these processes.

#### **Research Questions 4 and 5**

The participants all agreed that exposing faculty to assessment and accreditation during their first year, even during onboarding, would be helpful. This early exposure could include providing documents during onboarding and offering information sessions as faculty are hired. Although faculty are busy during their first few years, many are expected to immediately begin key assessment data collection, so having knowledge of how these data fit into the "big picture" of their programs' accreditation is essential. OAA leadership could take a proactive approach by reaching out to faculty as soon as they are hired, and their program/departmental leadership should ensure that faculty are given opportunities to attend information sessions and integrate training sessions into their schedules, which could potentially be a part of their college service hours. Because all programs engage in data collection and reporting, involving early career faculty in

conversations surrounding assessment data and continuous improvement could be a college-wide practice, especially if they are collecting data for key assessments.

### **Research Question 6**

This study started to answer this question, but more research is needed to show the actual influence on task quality and completion. All the participants were interested in being involved with such a task management system but also wanted face-to-face training and information sessions. Participants shared that such a system could help them to stay informed and on-track, with quick access to previous trainings and tutorials that may be useful to their work.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 presented the findings for this study, along with an analysis of those findings relating to the significant themes and subthemes that emerged. The chapter started with an overview of the study, then moved into the general presentation of the three types of data, followed by a description of the general findings based on the three major themes: importance of understanding accreditation processes, impact of support for FYECF, and seeing the “big picture.” The chapter concluded with analysis of the data based on the research questions. Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the results of this study.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Accreditation and assessment require stakeholders to work together to meet accreditation standards and ensure continuous improvement. As the Director of the OAA, I engage faculty in these areas and ensure that the college's programs are meeting their accreditors' requirements. As part of this work, I must ensure that effective systems are in place so all faculty, including early career faculty, are involved with the assessment processes and have a strong understanding of the purpose and importance of this work. Many faculty are involved in this work through collecting and analyzing student data but may not be fully aware of how it fits into their program's accreditation. Often, early career faculty are not involved in these processes apart from key assessment data collection and faculty who are involved in this work later in their careers may not always have a firm understanding of the requirements or benefits. With the ever-changing requirements and standards associated with accreditation, faculty can have low morale related to engaging in this work.

To better understand the issues relative to assessment and accreditation in the college, this descriptive study aimed to determine the perceptions and needs of FYECF as they interact with OAA in the assessment work that is vital in the continuous improvement and accreditation of their programs. This study sought to understand the many responsibilities and level of support given to FYECF, their engagement in and

understanding of assessment and accreditation, the probable effects of being more involved in this work at the beginning of their faculty careers, and the possible influence of a technology-based management system on this work. In turn, this information could provide suggestions for improving the collaboration and work management throughout the COE and similar entities in tasks related to assessment and accreditation with a particular focus on the involvement of FYECF. The qualitative study incorporated open-ended survey questions, focus group questions, and semi-structured interviews. Coding the data surfaced three overall themes: importance of understanding accreditation processes, impact of support for FYECF, and seeing the “big picture.”

### **Results Related to Existing Literature**

Research indicates that mentoring and support during faculty members’ first few years are critical to their development and understanding of their new roles. The participants of this study were primarily clinical, apart from one faculty member who was an adjunct, whose unique needs were a theme throughout the data collection process. As McDaniel et al. (2019) indicate, “Clinically focused faculty report less familiarity with the promotion process, unclear departmental or divisional expectations, slower academic advancement, and less opportunity for mentorship by senior mentors on similar tracks” (p. 104). The participants shared their comfort with teaching due to their past experiences as either classroom teachers or instructors in higher education during their doctoral programs, but their knowledge of the many aspects of higher education, including service, culture, and organizational structure, were minimal. Many thought that this circumstance was due to being hired during COVID and engaging in largely remote based work but were also unsure if faculty normally go through a formal onboarding

process. The participants also shared their reliance on informal mentors but desired a formal mentoring process. Early career faculty often need assistance with learning the institutional climate and culture and can benefit from strong, formalized mentoring programs where these areas are addressed (McAvoy et al., 2021). Mentorship programs that provide clinical faculty with opportunities to connect, share ideas and strategies, and self-reflect can lead to improvement in meaningful outcomes (McDaniel et al., 2019).

As Northouse (2013) indicates, organizational members “will be motivated if they think they are capable of performing their work, if they believe their efforts will result in a certain outcome, and if they believe that the payoffs for doing their work are worthwhile” (p. 137). Data from this study revealed that the participants all had a desire to become more involved in assessment and accreditation to better understand these areas and how they relate to their data collection practices. They all shared that they knew their responsibilities were to collect data through the college’s assessment system as part of their program’s accreditation requirements, but they were not sure of what the next steps were and the appropriate ways to analyze these data for continuous improvement.

Effective leaders must adapt their behaviors according to their team members’ needs and transformational leaders specifically “share power, are willing to learn from others, and are sensitive to each team member’s needs for achievement and growth” (Gous, 2003, as cited in Basham, 2012, p. 344). By implementing leadership strategies reflective of evidence-based leadership theories, particularly transformational leadership theory, OAA leadership and program/department leaders can guide early career faculty through the areas of assessment and accreditation, considering their unique needs, and showing how their work feeds into these areas and increasing motivation to be more involved.



Research has also provided several principles that can help improve productivity and alleviate the ever-present issues with multi-tasking and communication overload in organizations. The implementation of group tasks, quality training that begins at the start of faculty careers, and strategic system design can contribute towards the operating of a more productive environment (Soucek & Moser, 2010). When asked if they often felt overwhelmed by all their duties and responsibilities in their faculty roles, the participants were divided with 1/3 somewhat agreeing, 1/3 somewhat disagreeing, and the other 1/3 neither agreeing nor disagreeing. One participant shared that although she would like to be more exposed to assessment and accreditation, she would not like the idea of adding more to her plate. Although all the participants agreed that email is their preferred method of receiving important information, half agreed that they often feel overwhelmed with the number of emails that they receive daily. Faculty are often overloaded with email communication and numerous other projects, so accreditation can often end overloaded with daily emails and constantly juggling multiple projects, with accreditation usually ending up at the end of to-do lists.

With the implementation of a technology-based task management system, some of this overload of information could be alleviated and processes streamlined. Research supports shifting faculty toward the use of a technology-based task management system to help overcome the multitude of tasks required to help prioritize tasks and narrow their focus on small, obtainable goals. “Combining information technology as an enabler and motivator yields an approach with multiple facets, each reflecting potential for increased productivity, higher satisfaction, and increased overall gains” (Burnett et al., 2014, p. 55). In such a system, all the work to be done and directions are housed in one space with

trainings and tutorials also included. Although the participants favored such a system, they also recommended a place for in-person collaboration, further guiding the need for a multi-faceted system.

### **Practice Recommendations**

Because action research allows institutional insiders to improve upon existing practices within their organizations (Herr & Anderson, 2015), the results from my study can inform my own work as an Assessment and Accreditation Director. One recommendation on a college-wide level that I gathered from this study was the importance of implementing formal mentoring programs for clinical and adjunct faculty, who “comprise an increasing proportion of academic faculty nationally, yet [...] underutilize mentorship” (McDaniel et al., 2019, p. 104). The participants spoke about how beneficial their informal mentors were in their early years and many agreed that these mentors were their main and sometimes only support systems. Incorporating a formal process with designated mentors would be beneficial to their continued growth and development as early career faculty. Such a process could start with gaining a better understanding of the mentor processes at the university and college levels for tenure-track faculty, working with other colleges to see the mentoring processes that may or may not be in place for their clinical and adjunct faculty, and gathering additional feedback from these faculty members to understand their unique needs.

OAA should also consider how the office can better assist faculty in understanding assessment and accreditation, ensuring that this work is beneficial to the work that is already occurring for faculty at all levels. OAA staff should work with departments to ensure that onboarding occurs and include information regarding the

purpose of accreditation and the processes involved, allowing faculty to see the “big picture” as soon as they are hired and understand how their work in key assessment data collection aligns. Senior faculty could also work with OAA in promoting the needs and benefits so that the importance of assessment and accreditation is rooted within the departments and communicated throughout the college. OAA staff could become a part of the mentoring and onboarding processes, engaging new faculty in this work and assisting them with analyzing data and making modifications to their rubrics and assignments based on their students’ performance on key assessments. The participation in these training sessions could be included in the faculty’s college service hour requirements, further encouraging engagement and willingness to be a part of this work. OAA should also implement trainings that are available to faculty in multiple formats. Based on the participants’ feedback throughout this study, these trainings should include a broad overview of assessment and accreditation, establishing and aligning learning outcomes, using the Chalk & Wire system in the most effective ways, and creating rubrics for assessments.

Another recommendation that could also provide opportunities for future research would be piloting a technology-based task management system that would house the tasks and projects in areas related to assessment and accreditation, with embedded trainings, webinars, and tutorials that can be accessed in both real time and on demand. Implementing such a system could provide support for faculty at all levels and encourage increased productivity, morale, and understanding in these tasks surrounding the work of OAA that crosses over with faculty throughout the college. Within all these

recommendations, collecting feedback and input from both early career faculty members and others throughout the college involved in this work is imperative.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

This study was limited to clinical and adjunct faculty in the college due to the college's pool of early career faculty and those who were interested and able to be a part of the study. Only a few tenure-track faculty were eligible based on years of experience, but they were either in programs that do not undergo accreditation or were not willing to participate in this study. The adjunct faculty member who was involved with the study has a full-time job outside of the college and would not be able to engage in more work or attend trainings like the other participants, but her unique perspective enhanced this study due to her involvement in her program's CAEP accreditation and her continuous collaboration with the program's full-time faculty. Due to these limitations, I was not able to obtain perspectives from tenure-track faculty on the formal mentoring process that they undergo and how it benefits their early years. Future researchers may seek a pool of participants with more variety in their roles, including an equal number of tenure-track instructors.

This study was also confined in number, with having only six participants across the entire college. Although purposeful sampling was appropriate for this study's specific questions, the results may not be transferrable to other institutions due to the unique nature of each college/university. Future researchers may seek input from participants at other institutions, bringing in different perspectives on this work. Also, my own biases toward assessment and accreditation and the possibility of involving early career faculty in this work could have presented a limitation in this study. Although I used multiple

qualitative data sources to answer and analyze each research question, the results of any qualitative research study are limited to the researcher's own positionality (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Another limitation is that this study only captured perspectives from early career faculty with 1–3 years of experience who have not had an opportunity to gain a full understanding of all of their responsibilities within the college and how working more with assessment and accreditation could impact them. Incorporating faculty members with at least 4-6 years of experience to reflect on their full experience over the years and provide feedback on their perspectives as an early career faculty member as compared to their current perspectives could provide additional information that could be useful to OAA.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study suggests many opportunities for future research. Due to the limitation of only including clinical and adjunct faculty, conducting research that allows for comparisons between tenure-track faculty and clinical faculty would be helpful. One of the participants mentioned an early career tenure-track faculty member in her program going to trainings that she was not aware of, so having a better understanding of the opportunities available for the various faculty positions throughout the college would be beneficial. Implementing quantitative data collection methods could be beneficial in measuring the differences in these faculty members' mentoring levels and support and measuring the effects on their work. Also, incorporating faculty members who are further into their careers into a study such as this, allowing them to reflect on their full experiences from their early years and comparing them to their current experiences could

provide additional information that could be useful in understanding the impact of engaging in assessment and accreditation work earlier in faculty careers.

Another possibility for future research could include implementing a study that involves the use of a technology-based management system that includes in-person opportunities for further training. One research question that I could not fully answer throughout this study was how the implementation of a technology-driven task management system could influence FYECF's task quality and completion. Through the implementation of this system, the researcher could measure the effectiveness of the participants' productivity related to assessment work while also measuring their perceptions of engaging in this work using this type of system.

Longitudinal studies could also be formed during the preparation for an accreditation visit over the course of this process, comparing participants' perceptions of assessment and accreditation by enlisting participants who have been engaged with this type of work since the beginning of their faculty careers and others who have not, while also gaining a better understanding of the benefits that this early engagement could or could not have provided for them throughout their careers.

### **Summary**

This action research process was very informative to my work as an Assessment and Accreditation Director. The results obtained from the qualitative data collection methods can drive future improvements for both my office and the college overall. Exposing faculty to assessment and accreditation practices early in their careers that allow for socialization along with training opportunities could encourage the long-term

success of the new faculty and, in turn, the long-term success of OAA and its work. Through early exposure, the participants may potentially have a more positive outlook on assessment and accreditation, especially if tasked with a more active role in these processes later in their careers. OAA leadership should take a proactive approach by connecting with faculty as soon as they are hired, and their program/departmental leadership should ensure that faculty have opportunities to attend information sessions and integrate training sessions into their schedules. These changes could positively impact our work in the college and, in turn, ensure continuous improvement of the college's programs.

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## APPENDIX A

### FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

#### Engaging Question

1. What are some of your primary responsibilities/duties as an early career faculty member?
  - a. Which responsibility/duty do you feel that you are the most prepared in as an early career faculty member and why?
  - b. Least prepared?

#### Exploration Questions

2. Describe the supports that you have received in preparing you for your role as a faculty member.
  - a. What support(s) have been the most helpful? (For example, mentoring, trainings, etc.)
  - b. If you could, what additional supports would you like to receive to better prepare you for all your responsibilities/duties as a faculty member?
3. Describe your involvement in (if any) and knowledge level of your program's accreditation processes. (for example, CAEP, CACREP, Specialized Professional Associations, etc.)
4. Describe your involvement in (if any) and knowledge level of your program's annual assessment plan submissions.
5. In what ways (if any) would being involved in work related to assessment and accreditation at the beginning of your faculty career be beneficial?
6. How could the Office of Assessment and Accreditation better support programs (and you as an early career faculty member) in the areas of assessment and accreditation?

#### Exit Question

7. Do you have additional comments or suggestions that may be helpful related to your experiences and thoughts on assessment and accreditation and/or your role and responsibilities as an early career faculty member?

## APPENDIX B

### PARTICIPANT SURVEY

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Please answer the following questions as honestly and entirely as possible. These questions concern your responsibilities as an early career faculty member and your knowledge level/experiences with assessment and accreditation.

The purpose of this survey is for Assessment and Accreditation staff to gain a better understanding of early career faculty members' roles in assessment and your overall duties and levels of support in the first few years of your faculty careers. It should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

We do not anticipate that taking this survey or engaging in the ensuing focus group will contain any risk or inconvenience to you. Furthermore, your participation is strictly voluntary, and you may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

All information collected will be used by the college's assessment staff for systematic improvement purposes. Your individual responses are confidential and will not be shared with program or department faculty. The data obtained from this survey will be shared in aggregate form in the researcher's Dissertation in Practice for the Curriculum & Instruction EdD program. There will be no connection to you specifically in the results or in future publication of the results. If you have any questions please contact: Lisa Peterson, Director of Assessment and Accreditation.

#### Position Information

1. Please select your university position.

Assistant Professor

Associate Professor

Adjunct Faculty

Clinical Faculty

Staff

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate below if you are tenure track or non-tenure track.

Tenure Track

Non-Tenure Track

Please select your current highest level of education.

BA/BS

CGS

MEd/MA/MS/MT/MAT

EdS

PhD

EdD

Other

Department Affiliation

EDST



ITE

PEDU

EDLP

How many years of experience do you have?

1<sup>st</sup> year faculty member

2<sup>nd</sup> year faculty member

3<sup>rd</sup> year faculty member

4<sup>th</sup>+ year faculty member

Do you have any experience as a faculty member at other colleges/universities?

Yes

If yes, please explain your experiences.

No

Did you teach coursework while enrolled in your advanced degree program(s)?

Yes

If yes, please explain your experiences.

No

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the assessment cycle?

Accreditation – sacsoc, cacrep/caep, etc.

Involvement

These items are assessed on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 – disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree).

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

1. The onboarding process that I went through in my first year as a faculty member was/has been beneficial.
2. I have a firm understanding of all my responsibilities/duties as an early career faculty member.
3. I feel prepared to handle all my responsibilities/duties as an early career faculty member.
4. I often feel overwhelmed with all the responsibilities/duties that I am faced with as an early career faculty member.
5. I feel that I should have more responsibilities/duties as an early career faculty member than I do now.
6. There are many resources available through the college and/or university in supporting me in the early years of my faculty career.
7. There are many resources available through the college in supporting me in the early years of my faculty career.
8. Email is my preferred method of receiving important information related to my role as a faculty member.
9. I often feel overwhelmed with the number of emails that I receive daily.
10. I prefer virtual trainings over in-person trainings when possible.
11. Please select your level of familiarity with your program's assessment plan.
12. Level of involvement with your program's annual assessment plan submissions.
13. Please select your level of familiarity with your program's accreditation requirements.

14. Please select your level of involvement with your program's accreditation processes.
15. Please select your level of interest in being more involved in the assessment and accreditation processes for your program.
16. I believe being involved in work related to assessment and accreditation at the beginning of my faculty career would be beneficial.
17. I believe the work related to assessment and accreditation should mostly be the responsibility of the program coordinator.
18. The Office of Assessment and Accreditation is considering implementing a technology-based task management system in the college that would provide training videos, project lists, and tasks to be completed that involve assessment and accreditation for each program and faculty/staff member involved in these processes. Please select your level of interest in using a system like this.
19. Email is my preferred method of receiving important information.
20. I often feel overwhelmed with the number of emails that I receive daily.
21. I prefer virtual trainings over in-person trainings when possible.

Open-ended:

1. Describe the onboarding process that you went through in your first year as a faculty member. In this description, include some of the strengths of this process and what you would improve.
2. What are some of your primary responsibilities/duties as an early career faculty member?
3. Which responsibility/duty do you feel that you are the most prepared in as an early career faculty member and why?
4. Which responsibility/duty do you feel that you are the least prepared in as an early career faculty member and why?
5. Describe the supports that you have received in preparing you for these responsibilities/duties. What support has been the most helpful? (For example, mentoring, trainings, etc.)
6. If you could, what additional supports would you like to receive to better prepare you for all your responsibilities/duties as a faculty member?

7. Describe your involvement (if any) in your program's accreditation processes. (for example, CAEP, CACREP, Specialized Professional Associations, etc.)
8. Describe your involvement (if any) in your program's annual assessment plan submissions.
9. In what ways (if any) would being involved in work related to assessment and accreditation at the beginning of your faculty career be beneficial?
10. The Office of Assessment and Accreditation is considering implementing a technology-based task management system in the college that would provide training videos, project lists, and tasks to be completed that involve assessment and accreditation for each program and faculty/staff member involved in these processes. Describe why you would or would not be interested in a system like this.
11. How could the Office of Assessment and Accreditation better support programs (and you as an early career faculty member) in the areas of assessment and accreditation?
12. Do you have additional comments or suggestions that may be helpful related to your experiences and thoughts on assessment and accreditation and/or your role and responsibilities as an early career faculty member?