

## **Introduction**

Project 5.1 of the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement is primarily responsible for researching the dynamics and effects of the assessment policies and practices of regional accrediting associations and state governments. More specifically, the project focuses on the relationships between regional and state assessment policies and practices, and the improvement of teaching and learning at public institutions of higher education.

The case studies are designed to provide Project 5.1 researchers with the opportunity to interview assessment policymakers at the regional and state levels. During these interviews, researchers and policymakers will discuss the relationship between assessment policy and the improvement of teaching and learning in a way that both complements and supplements earlier research efforts (i.e., collection and analysis of policy documents, collection and analysis of questionnaire responses). In this sense, the case studies are a logical progression of the project's three-year research efforts. The data collected during the interviews, in addition to any further policy documentation that is gathered, will be analyzed and interpreted within a policy analysis framework, and used to develop multiple policy models for states and associations to use as they grapple with the complexities of assessment, accountability, and the improvement of teaching and learning.

These assessment policy models will be designed to serve the needs of a variety of different audiences. Included among these audiences will be state legislators and staff, state higher education executive officers and agencies, state assessment officers, regional accrediting association officers, boards of trustees/regents, campus executive officers, institutional assessment officers, faculty, and assessment scholars and researchers.

## **Protocol for Policy Experts in the State Higher Education Executive Office**

### Purpose

To elicit data and information from higher education policy experts who comprise the officers and staff of the governing/coordinating boards. This protocol consists of five sections containing questions that capture both general and specific information regarding:

1. The origin of the state assessment policy;
2. The codification of the state assessment policy;
3. The implementation of the state assessment policy;
4. The data and information systems used in policy implementation; and
5. The evaluation of the state assessment policy.

## **1. Origin**

- Please provide us with an historical overview of the events and policy context that led to the consideration of your state’s assessment policy.
- What motivated the state’s interest in assessment?
- What were the primary external influences on assessment policy development?
- Who were the most important “players” within the state in terms of assessment?
- Could you identify the reactions of the colleges and universities in your state as the policy developed?
- Please describe the components of your present state assessment policy and provide us a written copy of the current policy.

## **2. Codification**

- Could you provide some details regarding any legislative action pursuant to this policy?
- How does the assessment policy work?
- What are the key provisions of the policy?
- What are the policy’s objectives? What are the policy’s outcomes?
- To what extent are institutions providing input about defining and measuring quality?
- What do policy makers in this state really mean by goals like improving college teaching and increasing student learning? How are these goals made actionable?

### **Questions for the State Higher Education Financial Officer**

- What is the budget for implementing the policy?
- How has this policy affected the fiscal and budgeting processes?
- What appropriations mechanisms exist related to the policy? How have these changed?
- What fiscal/financial effects does this policy have on institutions?

## **3. Implementation**

- How is the policy implemented?
- Who are the policy’s supporters, and who are the policy’s opponents?
- Who are the principal players at the campus and governing board level involved in implementation?
- Who are the major audiences this policy is intended to reach?
- What committees or organizations have been formed by the state to oversee or help facilitate the implementation of this policy?
- Please provide details regarding institutions that have been successful and those that have had difficulty with the implementation of this policy.
- What changes has your office observed as a consequence of the state assessment policy?
- How has this policy affected teaching and learning from your perspective?

### **Questions for the State Higher Education Academic Officer**

- What is the nature of the relationship between this policy and the academic components of institutions?
- How has the assessment policy influenced the quality of academic programs at your institutions?
- What effect has the assessment policy had on the performance of colleges and universities?
- What indicators and instruments have been developed/chosen to measure student outcomes?
- Has there been a difference between the policy’s objectives and the policy’s outcomes?

### **Questions for the State Higher Education Executive Officer**

- How is the assessment policy viewed within the context for higher education at the state level?
- How important is assessment to the state legislature?
- What has been the political effect on the system in the state?
- What type of political will exists to continue with the implementation of this policy?
- How would you characterize the quality of communications between (a) governing boards and institutions; (b) SHEEO and the legislature; (c) institutions and the legislature?
- In what ways has the policy influenced the legislature's view of higher education?
- Are there specific issues you would like to raise that we have not discussed?

#### **4. Data and Information Systems**

- What are the instruments used in assessment? Why were these instruments chosen?
- What databases/data sets does your office compile and maintain.
- What types of reports does the executive office regularly produce?
- What types of reports of other forms of information are provided to the state assembly?
- What types of reports of other forms of information are provided to institutions?
- How has instituting this assessment policy affected the state system of higher education?

### **Questions for the State Higher Education Information Officer**

- Is there any support for database development?
- What types of new data have been generated/analyzed?
- How has any new information been used?
- Please provide us with copies of any reports or articles you have generated.

#### **5. Evaluation**

- Have any formal evaluations of the state assessment policy been conducted?
- How is the policy's effectiveness measured? What indicators are used to judge effectiveness?
- What results have been obtained? How effective is the policy?
- What influence does this policy have upon teaching and learning?
- Where is the state headed in the future with this policy?
- What types of media coverage have been generated regarding this state assessment policy and how have they influenced the evolution of the policy?

### **Protocol for State Legislators**

#### **Purpose**

To obtain the perspective of legislators involved in the development, oversight, and evaluation of the state's assessment policy. These questions are designed to elicit information about:

1. Their general level of knowledge about the state assessment policy;
2. Their level of awareness regarding whether the state assessment policy plays a role in the legislative process for higher education;
3. The value of the assessment policy to the state; and,
4. The future directions of state assessment policy.

- What does the legislature hope to achieve with this policy? What is your view of the policy's intent?
- How important are assessment and this assessment policy to the state legislature?
- In what ways has the policy influenced the legislature's view of higher education?
- Has the policy helped to achieve state goals for higher education, e.g., accountability, quality, improvement, reform, efficiency, effectiveness, etc.?
- Has the state assessment policy caused the legislature to become more informed about colleges and universities in the state?
- What types or level of communications/information flow exist between the legislature and the SHEEO and between the legislature and the institutions regarding the state assessment policy?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the policy?
- How would you gauge the political will for continuing with a state assessment policy?
- What changes does the legislature envision making to improve the state assessment policy?
- What types of media coverage have been generated regarding this state assessment policy and how have they influenced the actions of the legislature?
- What do legislators in this state really mean by goals like improving college teaching and increasing student learning? What specific changes would the assembly like to see?

### **Protocol for Campus Leaders Involved in Assessment**

#### Purpose

To obtain the perspective of those involved in assessment efforts and affected by the state assessment policy at the institutional level.

- How has the development and implementation of the state assessment policy affected your institution?
- What persons or groups have been primarily responsible for the development and implementation of assessment activity at the institution?
- What specific improvements or changes in faculty teaching and student learning have occurred that are attributable to the state assessment policy?
- What is the general view of the faculty regarding the state assessment policy?
- Have you recognized any changes resulting from assessment activity?
- Have any resource allocations been made to support the assessment effort?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the state assessment policy from the institutional perspective?
- What is your view on the quality of information/communication your institution has with the a) legislature and b) with the SHEEO?

## **Protocol for Regional Accreditation Associations**

### Purpose

To obtain the perspective of those who promote assessment activity through the accreditation criteria required for institutions.

- Please provide us with an historical overview of the events and policy context that led to the consideration of your association's assessment policy.
- Could you identify the reactions of the colleges and universities in your region as the policy developed?
- How does the assessment policy work? What are the key provisions of the policy?
- What are the policy's objectives? What are the policy's outcomes?
- What does the association really mean by goals like improving college teaching and increasing student learning? How are these goals made actionable?
- What kind of training and workshops do you provide for campus administrators?
- Please provide details regarding institutions that have been successful and those that have had difficulty with the implementation of this policy. Has any institution failed to meet your standards?
- What changes has your office observed as a consequence of the your assessment policy?
- How has this policy affected teaching and learning from your perspective?
- Have any formal evaluations of the association's assessment policy been conducted?
- How is the policy's effectiveness measured? What indicators are used to judge effectiveness?
- Where is the association headed in the future with this policy?
- What types of media coverage have been generated regarding the assessment policy and how have they influenced the evolution of the policy?