

COLLEGE SURVIVAL AND SUCCESS SCALE™

SECOND EDITION

John J. Liptak, Ed.D.

Administrator's Guide

Introduction

Preparing for college success is not an easy task. Students in high school are poorly prepared for academic or social success in college. Conley (2005) suggests that preparing for college is more complicated than it appears and that most parents of high school students, most high school students, and most teachers believe, or at least hope, that the college preparation curriculum is designed so that students will be successful in higher education. He cautions that “parents would likely be shocked to learn that the relationship between the high school instructional program and college success is imprecise at best” (p. 3). The college graduation rates have hovered around 50 percent for decades (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Similarly, the standard for completing a college degree has increased from four years to six years (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates, 2005). In fact, nearly one out of five four-year institutions of higher education has less than one-third of its first-time, full-time, degree-seeking first-year students graduate within six years (Carey, 2004).

Part of the problem is that more people from a wider, more diverse pool of undergraduates are being admitted to colleges and universities. However, many of these students do not have the academic or social skills needed to be successful when they are admitted to college (Keller, 2001). Kazis, Vargus, and Hoffman (2004) suggest that in the years to come, four-fifths of high school graduates will need some form of postsecondary education to acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities they will need to address the complex social, economic, and political issues they will face in their lives and their careers. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005) suggest that several factors are believed to help students be more satisfied and perform better in college. These factors include

- Helping students to succeed academically
- Helping students to cope with nonacademic responsibilities
- Helping students to learn the value of education
- Helping students to thrive socially and interpersonally
- Helping students to develop their careers

Therefore, to be successful in college, students must do more than be successful in the classroom. That is why both traditional-age and nontraditional students in colleges and universities are reporting record levels of stress (Von Steen, 2000). Von Steen suggests that college students go through a journey from freshman year to graduation that includes certain developmental issues and tasks that they must contend with, including the following:

Freshman year: First-year students are attempting to differentiate themselves from their parents and achieve greater self-definition. In their attempts to do so, they must develop friendships on campus, manage their time differently, manage their resources differently, learn to study differently, and begin to think about their career development.

Sophomore year: Second-year students are struggling to establish identity, deal with greater autonomy, and develop purpose. The focus is often on career planning and choosing a major and finding competence in that major.

Junior year: Third-year students become more committed to their personal and academic lives. They show an increased sense of the value of education, a greater focus on classes in their major, enhanced knowledge about study skills, and increased commitment to intimate relationships.



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Senior year: Fourth-year students tend to focus on the future, whether that entails a job search or applications to graduate programs. They are forced to examine their relationships in light of graduation and think about where they would like to live.

As you can see, college students must deal with a variety of developmental tasks as they work toward graduation from college.

College Student Concerns

Transitioning to college from high school can be a very difficult process for some people. Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) suggest that entering college means letting go of the way you were and developing a new identity. They suggest that the transition to college changes your life in many ways, including your roles as student, family member, friend, child, parent, worker; your daily routines of studying, playing, and working; your relationships with friends, teachers, parents, and spouse; and your assumptions and the ways you think about yourself (p. 7).

According to Bishop, Gallagher, and Cohen (2000), students experience a wide variety of problems in college that can be addressed by counselors to enhance student adaptation and retention (adapted from the Taxonomy on pp. 109–110):

Interpersonal and Social Adjustment

- Dating concerns
- Social issues
- Interpersonal problems
- Relationship difficulties

Academic Concerns

- School performance
- Poor study skills
- Test taking
- Grades

Career Concerns

- Career uncertainty
- Career path unclear
- Lack of knowledge about interests/abilities
- Choosing a major

Personal Adjustment

- Resource management
- Financial management
- Self-esteem issues
- Time management

Commitment

- Being own their own
- Understanding value of education

Cahn (2009) feels that college and university students must be adequately prepared for instruction inside the classroom as well as for life beyond the classroom. Crosling, Thomas, and Heagney (2008) suggest that retention of college students remains a significant concern for administrators in higher education settings. They find that students tend to drop out of college for a variety of reasons that administrators must first identify through basic assessments. They assert that “if students are to continue with their studies, institutions need to recognize their needs and provide them with a reasonable chance of succeeding in their studies” (p. 4). It is then that institutions can support their students, increase student likelihood of success in college, and increase their own retention rates.

Student Retention

The issue of student retention has persisted and perplexed administrators in colleges and universities for many years. An ACT (2004) survey suggests that the reasons that students do not persist in college is due to a lack of motivation to succeed, inadequate financial resources, inadequate preparation, and poor study skills. In addition, the study says that the primary reason for attrition in college is that students are simply not prepared for college and college life. This survey reports that only about a quarter of the students who graduated from high school are prepared for college-level work in math, science, English, and reading.

There has been a great number of research studies intended to identify the specific reasons why students are not successful when they get to college. Some of the most recent research suggests that students are not successful because of such issues as lack of family support, lack of or too many extracurricular activities, inadequate college faculty-student interactions, and lack of involvement in activities on college campuses. Astin (1993) finds that the persistence or retention rate of college students is greatly affected by the level and quality of interpersonal interactions with peers, administrators, faculty, and staff.

Davis (2010) suggests that college and university administrators need to become more aware of how difficult it is for college students to be successful, especially students whose parents did not attend college. These “first-generation students are more likely to drop out, more likely to take longer to graduate if they don’t drop out, and more likely to get less out of a college education than their more traditional counterparts” (p. 1). He goes on to say that they are more likely to report feelings of low confidence and isolation, less career maturity, and less understanding of the benefits of a college education. He concludes that first-generation students seem to be missing something and that they can benefit from structured programs and assessments to help them make sense of their college experience.

One expert, Tinto (1975; 1993), suggests that student retention is a complex interplay between the student and the institutional environment. He contends that a student's decision to remain or depart from a college or university is the result of many different factors related to the individual's characteristics, his or her experiences, and external forces that compete with the college experience. In fact, he cites five factors as being critical to whether a student departs or remains in college, including a lack of commitment, time and resource adjustment issues, the lack of a social network, academic difficulty, and the lack of clear academic and career goals. These five factors make up the five scales on the *College Survival and Success Scale (CSSS)*.

Need for the CSSS

Many practitioners are calling for an increased use of assessments to help college students identify skills they need to succeed. Swing (2004) calls for high-quality assessments that can help students succeed, confirm existing practices, and create improvement to services to students. He says that high-quality assessments might measure perceptions, expectations, skill levels, emotions, and knowledge about college, as well as classroom learning. Similarly, Conley (2005) suggests that the reasons many students never make a successful transition from high school to college can be broken into three distinct sets of factors: factors related to intellectual maturity and the ability to succeed in the classroom; lack of understanding of the purpose and opportunities of college; and general behaviors such as poor time management, lack of social skills, and poor financial management.

The CSSS is designed to meet the need for a brief assessment instrument to identify the concerns college students are experiencing or the concerns that prospective college students can anticipate. Some of the assumptions underlying the development of the CSSS include the following:

- People need to have knowledge about the skills they possess not only to survive in college, but to succeed.
- All people can succeed in college if they are made aware of their deficiencies. By being aware of their weaknesses regarding educational commitment, self-management and resource management, interpersonal and social skills, academic success skills, and career planning skills, people can overcome deficiencies.
- The transition to college can be very difficult for some people. By capitalizing on their strengths, people can cope with this difficult transition.
- College and university administrators will experience less attrition if they individualize their student services to better meet the specific needs and deficiencies of each student.

As the number of unprepared college students continues to rise and the retention rates of those students continue to fall, colleges are facing greater challenges in identifying student strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, students and prospective students need as much information about their strengths and weaknesses as possible. In addition, college administrators need to find ways to help students be more successful and stay in college. The purpose of the CSSS is to quickly identify students' weaknesses related to being successful in a college or university environment.

Audience for the CSSS

The CSSS is intended for use in high schools, community colleges, learning services centers, student support services, college counseling centers, retention services programs, pre-major advising centers, college orientation programs, Talent Search programs, Upward Bound programs, peer-mentoring programs, employment programs, rehabilitation counseling programs, first-year experience programs, academic advising centers, college career and placement offices, military-to-college transition programs, prisons, and any agency that works with clients or students interested in attending a college or university.

The CSSS can be administered to individuals or to groups. It is written for individuals at any age at or above the junior high school level. The CSSS has an eighth-grade reading level. Because none of the items is gender specific, the CSSS is appropriate for a variety of audiences and populations.

Description

The CSSS has been designed for easy use. It is simple to take and can be easily scored and interpreted. The CSSS inventory contains 60 statements about surviving and succeeding in college, scoring directions, profile guide, interpretation guide, and success planning guide. Each of the items has been grouped into scales that are representative of a program that teaches college survival and success skills. The scales on the CSSS include

- Commitment to Education
- Self- and Resource-Management Skills
- Interpersonal and Social Skills
- Academic Success Skills
- Career Planning Skills

Administration

The CSSS is self-administered, and the inventory is consumable. Administrators need no special training. A pencil or pen is the only other item necessary for administering, scoring, and interpreting the inventory. Begin by distributing one CSSS to each person

interested in taking it. The first page of the inventory contains spaces for normative data, including name, date, gender, and age. Each respondent should fill in the necessary information on this page. Specific instructions for answering items on the CSSS are included on the front page and in Step 1. Read the directions on the first page and in Step 1 while all respondents follow along. Test administrators should ensure that each respondent clearly understands all of the instructions and the response format. Respondents should be instructed to mark all of their responses directly on the inventory. The CSSS requires approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Completing the Scale

The CSSS uses a series of steps to guide the respondent through the administration of the inventory. Responses are marked in Step 1 of the inventory. Respondents are asked to read each statement and then circle the numerical response that represents what they are currently doing in college or what they believe they would or would not do when they attend college. Step 2 provides instructions for scoring the assessment. Respondents simply add the total of the numbers they circled for each of the five color-coded sections. Step 3 helps respondents to profile and to better understand their scores. Step 4 allows respondents to review suggestions for success and identify those suggestions that they are doing currently and those that they need to begin doing. Activities are suggested to help respondents become more successful in college. Step 5 allows respondents to develop an action plan for being more successful in college.

Calculating and Profiling Scores

The CSSS was designed to be scored by hand. All scoring is completed on the consumable inventory. No other materials are needed to score or interpret the instrument, thus providing immediate results for the test taker.

1. Respondents are asked to total the numbers they circled for each of the five sections in Step 1. These scores will range from 12 to 48 for each of the sections. Respondents then put that number in the Total box for each section on the CSSS.
2. In Step 3, respondents mark an X along each of the five number lines to represent their scores for the five scales.

Understanding Your Scores

The CSSS yields content-referenced scores in the form of raw scores. A raw score, in this case, is the total score of responses to each of the statements. The performance of individual respondents or groups of respondents can be evaluated only in terms of the mean scores on each of the scales.

For the CSSS, scores between 12 and 23 are **LOW** and indicate that the respondent needs to be more proactive and do more to both survive and succeed in college. Scores between 24 and 36 are **AVERAGE** and indicate that the respondent is probably doing

enough to survive, but needs to be more proactive and do more to succeed in college. Scores between 37 and 48 are **HIGH** and indicate that the respondent is probably being proactive and doing the things that are necessary to both survive and succeed in college.

Respondents generally have one or more areas in which they score in the low or low-average categories. That means that the respondent needs to learn more about that particular aspect of surviving and succeeding in college. These are the areas in which the respondent should begin gaining additional skills. The place to start this exploration is the next step of the CSSS. Respondents should turn to Step 4 and read the information provided and consider doing the activities in those sections on which they scored the lowest.

Understanding the College Survival and Success Profile

Because the primary objective of this instrument is to help students learn more about their college survival and success strengths and weaknesses, the CSSS is organized so that it contains five scales that were deemed critical in surviving and succeeding in college. The following section paraphrases the scale descriptions as they appear on the CSSS. These scales were chosen as representative of college success by independent judges.

The CSSS Basic Scales

Section 1: Commitment to Education—Low scores on this scale indicate that you are not yet a lifelong learner. You may not be aware of how education provides you with the skills for success. You may not be aware of how education enhances your career and life possibilities. You may also not understand how education improves your employability and earning potential.

Section 2: Self- and Resource-Management Skills—Low scores on this scale indicate that you are not yet ready to manage your time or money. You may not know about the financial aid that is available to you. You may not have a plan for budgeting and managing your money. You may also have difficulty in managing your time among school, work, and social obligations.

Section 3: Interpersonal and Social Skills—People scoring low on this scale tend not to have the most effective human relations skills. You may have trouble getting to know other students or do not value diversity in college. You may not have good communication skills, may need assistance in dealing effectively with professors, and may have difficulty in handling conflict with others.

Section 4: Academic Success Skills—People scoring low on this scale tend not to be the most effective students. You may need assistance in building knowledge through reading and studying. You may need help in taking notes, doing research, and preparing for tests. You may also need to learn to write more effectively.

Section 5: Career Planning Skills—People scoring low on this scale tend not to be as career-committed and career-mature as they could be. You may not have thought that much about your own career or career development. You may not have defined a clear

career path or started to investigate potential careers. You may also not know much about occupations that match your interests, skills, and personality.

Illustrative Case

The CSSS profile to the right shows the assessment results for an 18-year-old man who is a freshman at a community college. While participating in the First-Year Experience program, he took the CSSS. As can be seen from his profile, the respondent scored in the low range on every scale on the CSSS. This student probably will drop out if the appropriate interventions are not used. The student scored lowest in Career Planning Skills and Academic Success Skills. These are the two areas in which he needs the most instruction and assistance in developing effective skills.

He will need to develop career maturity through such activities as visiting the college's career planning office to talk with a counselor, taking career assessments to identify personal characteristics that will match majors on campus, developing a long-range career plan, and revising the plan as needed. In addition, he will need immediate assistance in developing better academic success skills. To do so, he may need to develop a study schedule for his classes, form study groups with other freshmen, and visit the college's writing center and learning center. Because all of his scores were in the low range, he will eventually need assistance in all of the five areas, but the interventions should begin with the areas in which he scored the lowest.

Revisions to the Second Edition

For the second edition of the CSSS, some items were revised and updated from the first edition to illustrate changes in society, college life, and the use of technology. Additional journaling prompts were provided for Step 4 of the assessment. Step 5 was changed slightly to activate students' thinking about how they will commit to making changes to ensure their college survival and success.

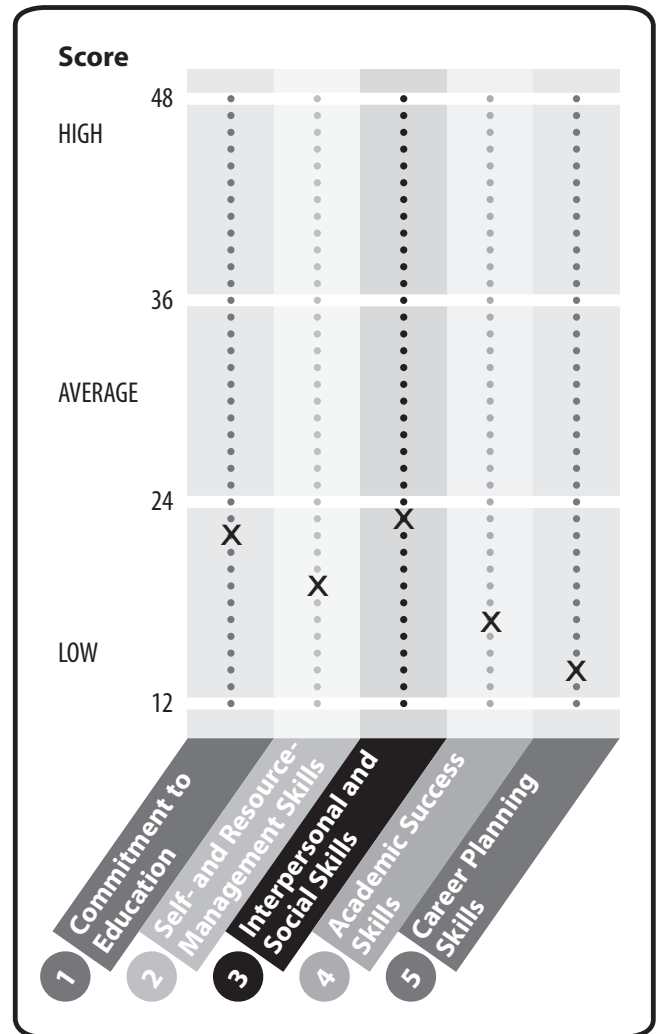
Research and Development

This section outlines the stages involved in the development of the CSSS. The stages include guidelines for development, item construction and selection, item standardization, and the development of reliability and validity norms.

Guidelines for Development

The CSSS is an inventory designed to measure a person's knowledge and attitudes about surviving and succeeding in a higher education setting. The inventory consists of a series of statements about things that a successful person would do or would not do in a college or university setting. The CSSS was developed to fill the need for a quick, reliable instrument to determine the areas in which respondents have sufficient knowledge and attitudes about succeeding in college and those areas in which respondents need additional training or instruction. The CSSS was developed to meet the following guidelines:

ILLUSTRATIVE CASE



1. **The instrument should measure a wide range of college survival and success skills.** For the CSSS, the five areas were identified from the literature on college success. The areas include Commitment to Education, Self- and Resource-Management Skills, Interpersonal and Social Skills, Academic Success Skills, and Career Planning Skills.
2. **The instrument should utilize a user-friendly format.** The CSSS uses a Likert question-answer format that allows respondents to quickly determine the college survival and success areas in which they are deficient.
3. **The instrument should be easy to administer, score, and interpret.** The CSSS utilizes a consumable format that guides the test taker through the five steps to complete the CSSS.
4. **The instrument should apply to both men and women.** Norms for the CSSS have been developed for both men and women.
5. **The instrument should contain items which are applicable to people of all ages.** Norms developed for the CSSS show an age range of 17–25.

Item Construction

My primary goal was to develop an inventory that measures an individual's skills in surviving and succeeding in a college setting. To ensure that the inventory content was valid, I conducted a thorough review of the literature related to college success, the transition to college, and college preparation. A variety of academic and professional sources were used to identify the five areas that represented college success skills.

A large pool of items that were representative of the five major aspects of college survival and success was developed and later revised. This enabled the elimination of items that did not correlate well. In developing items for the *CSSS*, I used language that is currently being used in the college retention literature, research, and college orientation programs. After the items were developed, they were reviewed and edited for clarity, style, and appropriateness for measuring skills needed in college. Items were additionally screened to eliminate any reference to sex, race, culture, or ethnic origin.

Item Standardization

The *CSSS* was designed to measure a person's attitudes about surviving and succeeding in a college setting. I identified high school and college students who completed drafts of the *CSSS* to gather data concerning the statistical characteristics of the items and their relation to other items on each scale. From this research, a final pool of 60 items was chosen that best represented the five major retention areas: Commitment to Education, Self- and Resource-Management Skills, Interpersonal and Social Skills, Academic Success Skills, and Career Planning Skills.

This initial research yielded information about the appropriateness of items for each of the *CSSS* scales; reactions of respondents concerning the inventory format and content; and reactions of respondents concerning the ease of administration, scoring, and profiling of the *CSSS*. The data collected included split-half correlations and interscale correlations. The items accepted for the final form of the *CSSS* were again reviewed for content, clarity, and style. Careful examination was conducted to eliminate any possible gender or race bias.

Reliability

Reliability is often defined as the consistency with which a test measures what it purports to measure. Evidence of the reliability of a test may be presented in terms of reliability coefficients and test-retest correlations. Tables 1 and 2 present both types of information. As can be seen in Table 1, split-half correlation coefficients for the *CSSS* ranged from .89 to .92; thus, the *CSSS* has excellent internal consistency. Many of these individuals were retested again after about one month had passed. As can be seen in Table 2, test-retest reliability for the *CSSS* ranged from .88 to .94. Thus, from these results, it was determined that the inventory measures what it sets out to measure.

Validity

Validity is often defined as the extent to which a test measures what it purports to measure. Evidence of validity for the *CSSS* is presented in terms of interscale correlations and examination of the means and standard deviations. The database consisted of more than 150 students who were either in college or about to start college in the next semester.

Concurrent validity of the *CSSS* can be found in Table 3. This table shows the interscale correlations for an adult sample of more than 75 individuals. The highest correlations (.34) are found between Commitment to Education and Career Planning Skills and Self- and Resource-Management Skills and Interpersonal and Social Skills. These low intercorrelations on the scales provide evidence of the individuality of the *CSSS* scale clusters.

Construct validity for the *CSSS* has been demonstrated with the administration of the assessment to 1,023 college students. Table 4 shows the construct validity for the *CSSS*. Sex differences in college survival and success skills strengths provide some support for the construct validity of the *CSSS*.

Females taking the *CSSS* scored lowest on the Academic Success Skills scale ($M=33.69$), suggesting that women need assistance most with developing effective classroom success skills. In addition, females tended to score low on the Career Planning Skills scale ($M=33.81$) and the Self- and Resource-Management Skills scale ($M=33.92$). Females scored highest on the Commitment to Education scale ($M=38.98$) and Interpersonal and Social Skills scale ($M=37.82$). Thus, females tend to understand the value and opportunities that college provides but can use assistance with academic success, planning their careers, and managing themselves and their resources.

On the other hand, males scored lowest on the Career Planning Skills scale ($M=33.66$), followed closely by the Academic Success Skills scale ($M=33.81$), suggesting that men in college need the most instruction in developing an effective career plan, followed by assistance in academic success and study skills. After those two scales, males scored lower on the Self- and Resource-Management Skills scale ($M=34.08$). Males scored highest on the Commitment to Education scale ($M=38.79$). Thus, males are committed to getting a college education, but poor career planning and a lack of self-management skills and resource-management skills become barriers.

Overall, men and women taking the *CSSS* tended to have very similar scores. When scores are combined for both men and women on the *CSSS*, respondents in general scored the lowest on the Career Planning Skills scale ($M=33.73$) and then the Academic Success Skills scale ($M=33.75$). This correlates with the research cited earlier about students entering college who are not academically prepared to complete college curriculums.

**Table 1: Internal Consistency
(split half)***

<i>CSSS Scale</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>
Scale 1	.90
Scale 2	.91
Scale 3	.92
Scale 4	.89
Scale 5	.90

*N=16

**Table 2: Stability
(test-retest correlation)****

<i>CSSS Scale</i>	<i>Test-Retest</i>
Scale 1	.94
Scale 2	.93
Scale 3	.88
Scale 4	.91
Scale 5	.92

*N=50 adults

**1 month after original testing

Table 3: CSSS Interscale Correlations*

<i>CSSS Scale</i>	<i>01</i>	<i>02</i>	<i>03</i>	<i>04</i>	<i>05</i>
01	1				
02	.27	1			
03	.29	.34	1		
04	.19	.31	.25	1	
05	.34	.21	.17	.22	1

*N=75

Table 4: CSSS Means and Standard Deviations

<i>CSSS Scales</i>	<i>Total (N=1023)</i>		<i>Male (N=502)</i>		<i>Female (N=521)</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Commitment to Education	38.89	4.59	38.79	4.60	38.98	4.59
Self- and Resource-Management Skills	33.99	5.60	34.08	5.55	33.92	5.63
Interpersonal and Social Skills	37.82	5.24	37.81	5.10	37.82	5.37
Academic Success Skills	33.75	5.65	33.81	5.62	33.69	5.68
Career Planning Skills	33.73	7.02	33.66	7.00	33.81	7.06

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About the Author

John Liptak, Ed.D., is one of the leading developers of quantitative and qualitative assessments in the country. He is the Associate Director of the Experiential Learning and Career Development office at Radford University in Radford, Virginia.

He provides career assessment and career counseling services for students and administers and interprets a variety of career assessments. Dr. Liptak also helps students to develop portfolios and search for employment and internship opportunities that match their interests and values. He focuses on helping students develop their careers by becoming engaged in a variety of learning, leisure, and work experiences.

In addition to developing the CSSS, Dr. Liptak has created the following assessments for JIST Publishing: *Career Exploration Inventory*, *Transition-to-Work Inventory*, *Job Search Knowledge Scale*, *Job Survival and Success Scale*, *Barriers to Employment Success Inventory*, and *Job Search Attitude Inventory*.

Dr. Liptak consults on the development of assessments for schools and agencies around the country and has developed specialized assessment instruments for use with clients. He is a regular speaker at national and international conventions on the topic of assessment and assessment development and is also a JIST-certified trainer.

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