



The Context and Conditions of Institutional Research: A Student Centered Institutional Research Imperative

Presented by: Dr. Randy L. Swing, Executive Director, AIR
Addison, Texas March 4, 2015

Thank you AIR Members



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Mr. Christopher S. Coogan,
Deputy Director & Chief of Staff



Dr. Darlena Jones, Director of
Assessment & Research
National Survey of IR Offices

The Shared Vision:
Successful Students and
Institutions by Using Data
to Make Smarter
Decisions and Policies.

I am passionate about
the capacity of higher
education to change
lives –



College Freshman - 1973

Who's An AIR member?

What do you know about YOUR Association?

- ~ 4,200 members each year
- Over 40 countries
- Texas has 202 AIR members – 4th largest state in membership
- AIR turns 50 years old next February
- Executive Office – Tallahassee, Florida since 1974

What does AIR do?



Research

Advocate for the field of IR

- Accreditors
- Presidential Associations
- State System Offices
- U.S. Department of Education
- National Science Foundation
- Philanthropic Organizations
- Media
- Ranking Projects

How is the field of IR doing?



Ending a Poor Joke

“The elevator story” can’t tell a stranger what IR is. . .
 “My family just tells friends that I teach at the college...”
 “I can’t figure out how to tell people what IR does...”

- **Why would anyone invest in a “just-trust-me-I’m-important-organization?”**
- **Resources follow compelling narratives!**

Disruptive Innovation (DI)
Is not just "Change"

- Disruptive innovators target their service or product at the needs of a new group of customers.
- DI uses enabling technologies
- DI leads to a new business model (over time)

Mark E. Raynor and Clayton M. Christensen, The Innovator's Solution, Harvard Business School Press, 2003.

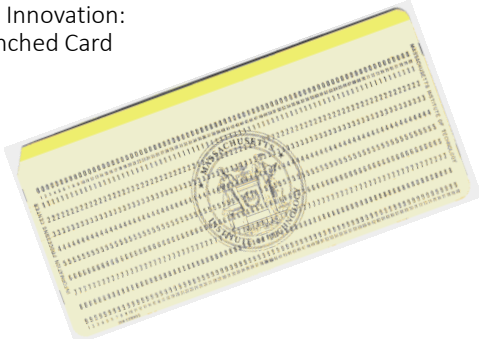
Semester System

~ 16 week-long term
2 terms plus summer

Quarter System

~ 10 week-long term
3 terms plus summer

Disruptive Innovation:
– IBM Punched Card



Reasons Not To Change



Disruptive Innovation in IR?

As with any disruptive innovation, there must be ready access and limited burden to entry.

- Data Warehouses
- Excel – Analytics
- Charts and graphs
- Survey software
- Networked Data Access

The Modern Institutional Research Office

Common words appearing in department names:

- Research
- Institutional Research
- Research and Information
- Research and Planning
- Analysis

48%

- Strategic Planning
- Academic Planning
- Institutional Planning
- Assessment
- Evaluation
- Effectiveness
- Institutional Effectiveness
- Enrollment Management
- Enrollment Research and Planning

49%



Source: The Foundations and Evolution of Institutional Research (J. Fredericks Volkwein, 2008)

Once Upon a Time... Just the Facts or More?

| | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Just the Facts . . . | Engaged professional . . . |
| “Arms-length”, neutral approach | Issue context |
| No interpretation | Facts – ordered to tell the story |
| No recommendations | Recommendations (multiple?) |
| Focus on methodology and data | Decision-making process |
| | Implementation |
| | Closing the loop, evaluation & review |

Swing, R. L. (2009). Institutional researchers as change agents. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2009: Issue 143, pages 5–16.

Data
don't
speak for
themselves!

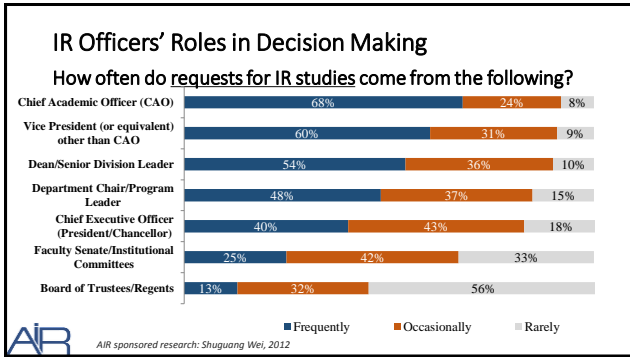
And they
never talk to
strangers. . .

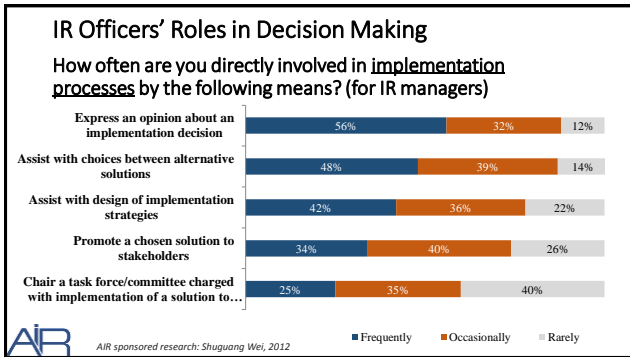
IR as Change Agents

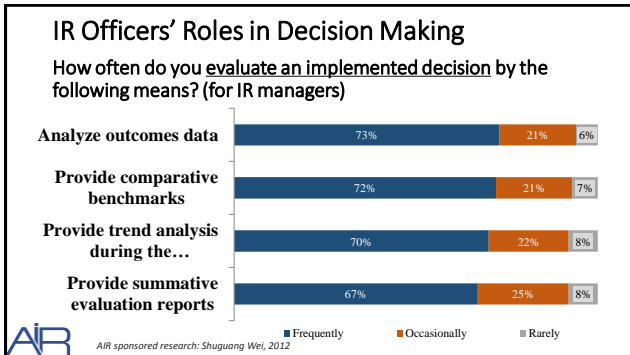
Involvement in the Decision Making Process

- Research by Shuguang Wei completed in July, 2012
- Research study of 956 AIR Members (stratified random sample) with ~ 60% response rate
- Following data charts based on IR Managers involvement in the Decision Making Process









2014-2015 College/University IR Priorities

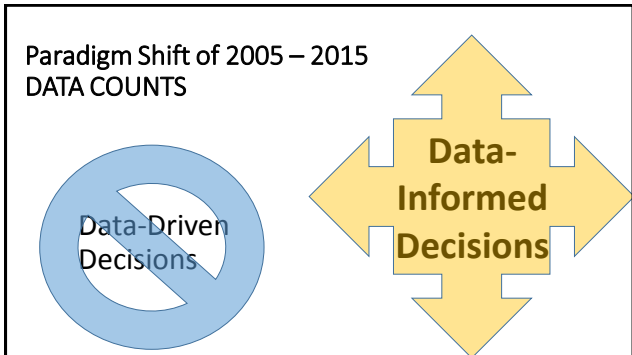
| IR Top Priorities Task/Function (Campus IR Respondents) | % Responses |
|--|-------------|
| Conduct research to support student success | 7.9% |
| Conduct compliance reporting | 7.1% |
| Provide support for institutional or program accreditation | 4.9% |
| Conduct research for decision support | 4.5% |
| Conduct enrollment research | 4.5% |
| Provide support for institutional strategic planning | 4.1% |
| Incorporate institutional dashboards | 3.4% |
| Participate in institutional strategic planning | 3.4% |
| Create a data warehouse | 3.0% |
| Conduct institutional assessment | 2.3% |
| Conduct student learning outcomes assessment | 2.3% |

AIR AIR sponsored research

2014-2015 – Change in IR Top Priorities

| Priorities Changed from 2013-2014 | % Response |
|--|------------|
| Issue was a 2013-2014 priority and continues to be in 2014-2015 | 71% |
| Issue was NOT a 2013-2014 priority but has become one in 2014-2015 | 27% |

AIR AIR sponsored research



Improving & Transforming Institutional Research in Postsecondary Education

- Initiative designed to better understand IR capacity & help IR evolve to the next level of practice

This work is funded by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation



Institutional Research: 2014 - Forward

IR has left the building
or at least the Office of IR

Is there another office on your campus that has dedicated staff “crunching numbers” for decision support?

Data and Data Tools are Everywhere!
Hybrid Model of Institutional Studies
Office of Institutional Research
&
Function of Institutional Research

Institutional Research:
50 Year History
of
Collaboration &
Networking

Supporting Decision-Makers
• Senior Leaders & External Stakeholders
Re-thinking who decision makers are:
Students as Decision Makers
Faculty as Decision Makers
Student Affairs Professionals as Decision Makers
Staff as Decision Makers

**Institutional Structures and Policies
are Necessary but Not Sufficient to
Assure Accomplishment of an
Institution's Mission**

Collective force of students as decision makers is the most powerful force on a college campus.

Direct influencers (faculty and staff) are 2nd in power.

**Think Like a
Change Agent -**

Supply and Demand
Both are IR business

Student-Focused IR Paradigm

- Align release of results with student/faculty calendars
 - "just in time decision support."
- Ask, "how does this research serve students?"
- State it – Close the Loop – Be Intentional – Create Action

The Chief Institutional Research Officer

Intentional Designs – Not Left to Chance

- Cabinet-level position
- Relationship management
- Crossroad building to connect data silos
- Data governance
- Data resource management
- Mapping data sources and institutional studies
- Supporting ALL data users and producers

Data Skills in Position Descriptions

- Explicit about data literacy
- Codify in job descriptions and performance reviews
- Professional Development
- Coaching and Consulting

Summary

Institutional Studies

- Offices of IR and units all across the campus
- Focus on decision-makers, including students and faculty
- Change agency perspective – supply & demand
- Intentional student-focused paradigm
- Building on the past, leveraging disruptive innovations

This journey is not for individuals who avoid change...

Buckle up – it is going to be a great ride!



INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHERS



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We eat data for breakfast.