

DATA-INFORMED ADVOCACY FOR COLLEGES

TRANSFORMING NUMBERS INTO NARRATIVES

TEXAS ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

Carolyn Sloane Mata, Ph.D.

Independent Colleges and Universities of Texas



ABOUT ME



Carolyn Sloane Mata
Coordinator, Data and Research
Independent Colleges and Universities of
Texas

Higher Education Consultant
CM Education Insights & Solution

Director/Coordinator of Data/Research for: NC, SC, GA, TX, OR
independent college associations

10 years as IPEDS Educator for NCES, frequent TRP invitee and
moderator

Led 5 cohorts of the AIR Data Literacy Institute

Coaching CA and HI cross-sector teams for the SHEEO Basic Needs
Academy

Served in IR at multiple institutions

Worked with AIR, Lumina, SHEEO, ECMC, NECHE, and SREB on
data/research projects

Assisted multiple institutions with accreditation self studies

ROADMAP



Current higher education climate



Why data –informed advocacy?



3 key lessons in data-informed advocacy



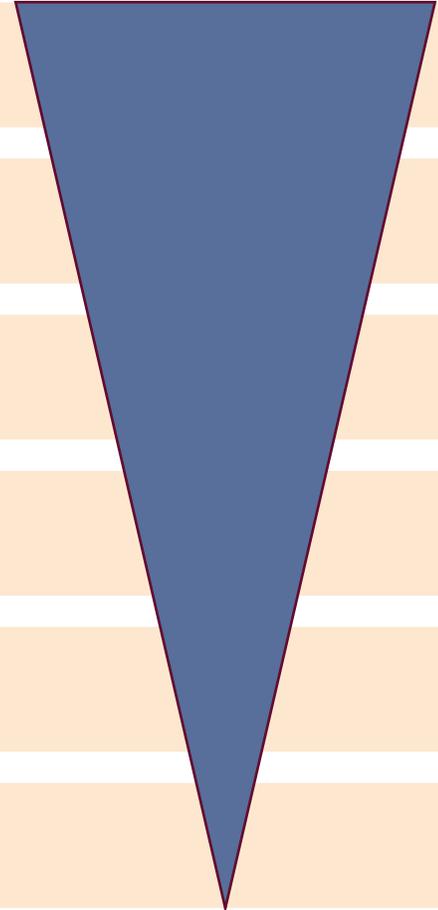
Starting with why and the importance of storytelling



Data that resonate –with examples



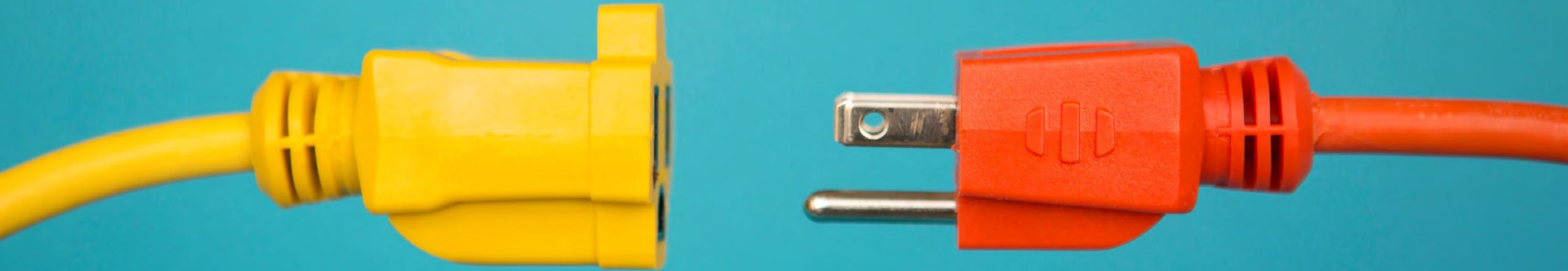
Where's the data?



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"why data" → "how to use it" → "where to find it."

IF THE DATA IS ON OUR SIDE, WHY DO WE STRUGGLE IN GETTING OTHERS TO MAKE THE SAME CONNECTIONS?



THE IMPORTANCE OF DATA-INFORMED ADVOCACY

SPOILER ALERT: GRAPHS DON'T CHANGE MINDS!

WHY INFORMED ADVOCACY?



Increased scrutiny and funding limitations threaten colleges and state systems.



Increased scrutiny and funding limitations threaten colleges and state systems.



Data translates mission into measurable impact.



Advocacy is stronger when rooted in facts and narratives.

3 KEY LESSONS

MANTRAS I REMIND MYSELF IN ADVOCATING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

LESSON 1: KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE



Tailor your data to what your audience values – same data point, different message.



Legislators may care more about job placement or ROI than academic accolades.



Community leaders might prioritize economic development and local partnerships.

THE AUDIENCE

Campus leadership

State agencies & system offices

Accreditors

Employers & regional partners

WHAT THEY CARE ABOUT

Student success momentum

Alignment with state priorities (workforce, attainment, affordability)

Clear assessment and continuous improvement cycles

Retention of graduates locally and sector alignment

HOW TO FRAME

Compared to peers, here's where we're outperforming/underperforming

Our outcomes directly support the state's priority of X (attainment/workforce)

Here's the trend, the interpretation, and the specific improvement implemented

Our graduates are staying local and filling roles in your sector

LESSON 2: START WITH THE “WHY”



Numbers alone
won't move hearts
or budgets



Contextualize every
data point with a
story, trend, or
community impact.



Lead with purpose,
then support with
data.

Data is the *proof*. But your *why* is the point.



The Difference

- a) Our graduation rate is 62%.

- b) Six out of ten students—many of them first-gen or Pell-eligible—are crossing the finish line, entering the workforce, and contributing to our state economy.

THE STATISTIC

42% Pell eligible students

60% of grads stay in state

20% transfer from community colleges

Average student debt \$7k below national average

WHY IT MATTERS

Expanding access to underserved students

Retaining local talent in workforce

Strong 2- to 4-year pathways

Lower financial burden on graduates

THE IMPACT

Upward mobility for families

Boosts state economic growth

Maximized completions across systems

Graduates with freedom to thrive and low default rates



The Difference

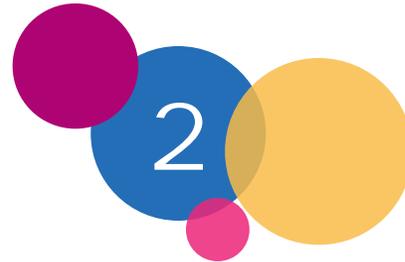
- a) 60% of our graduates stay in-state to work.

- b) More than half of students who graduate from our colleges remain in the state. We're not just educating students—we're investing in the local workforce pipeline.

LESSON 3: NOT ALL DATA IS WORTH THE SQUEEZE



Complex data/information can confuse rather than clarify for the audience.

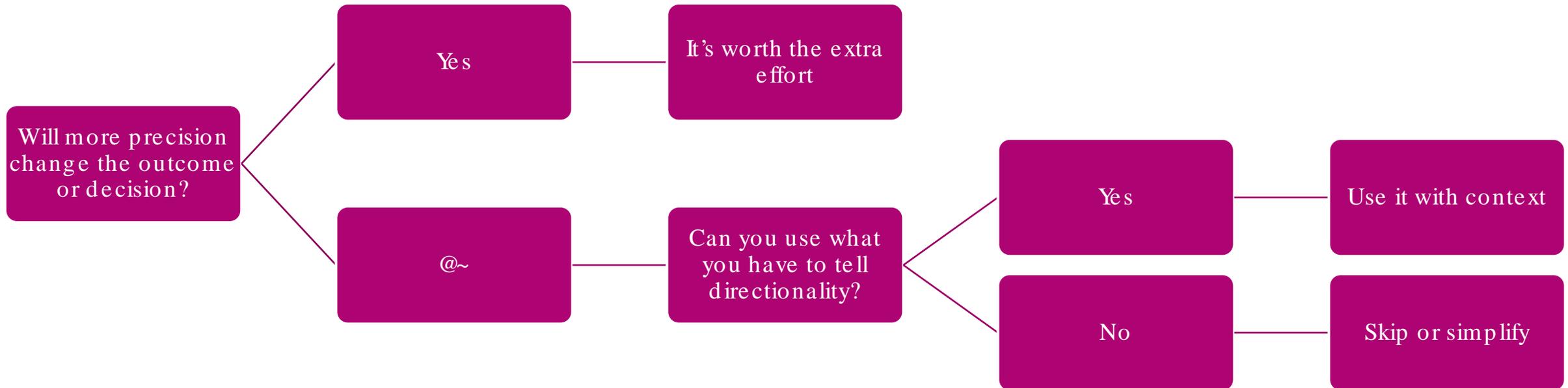


Consider the time and effort required to extract meaningful insights. When is enough, enough?



Focus on data that is timely, accurate, and clearly supports your message.

FLOWCHART: HOW MUCH JUICE TO SQUEEZE?



THE POWER OF “WHY”

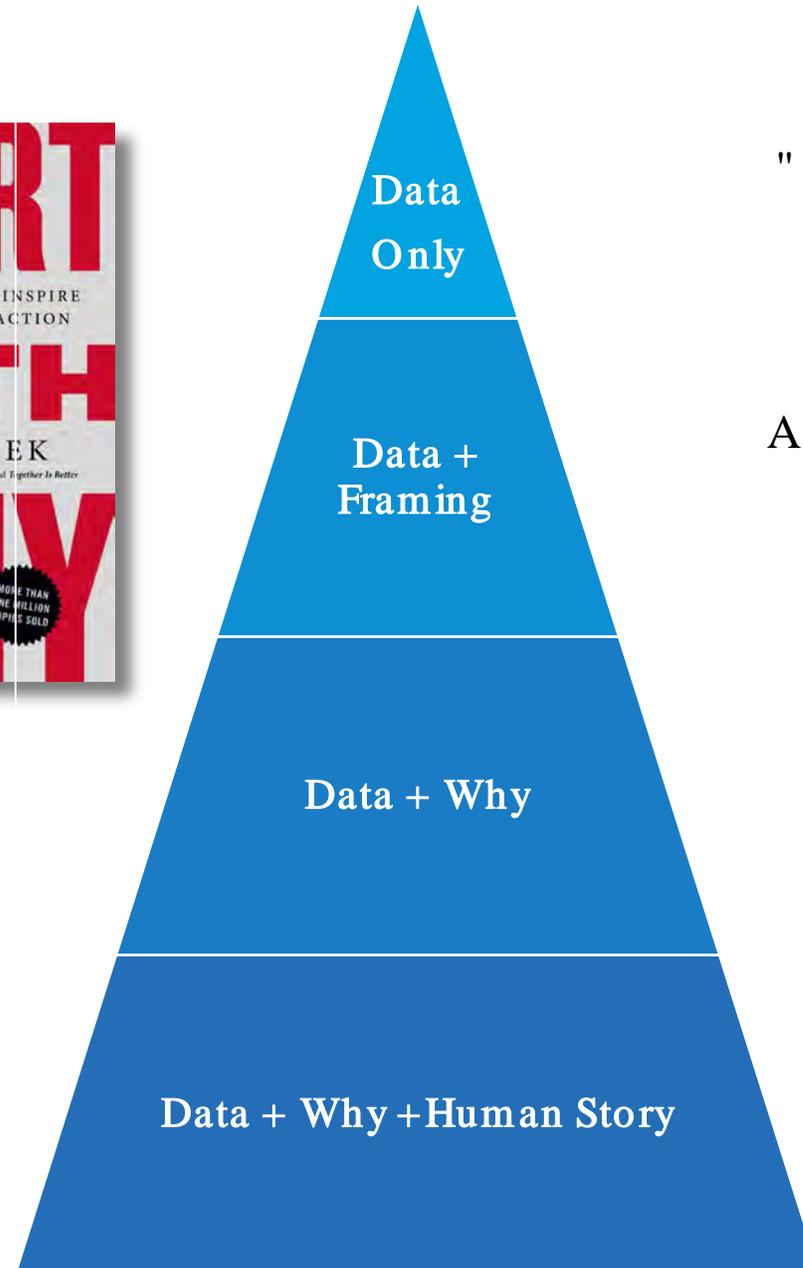
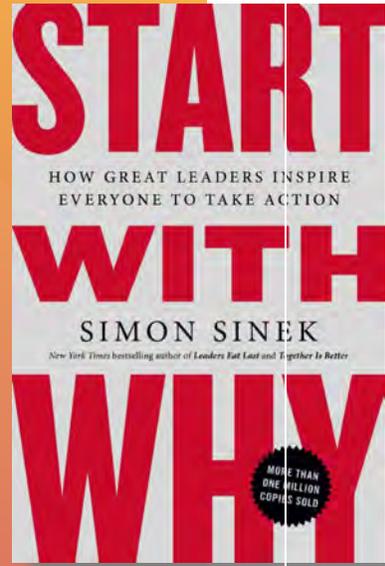
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THE POWER OF 'WHY'

Framing data around values builds emotional connection.

Helps stakeholders and the public connect to your institution's mission.

Elevates statistics into a compelling story.



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A trend with some structure

A value-driven message

The message that moves people

STARTING WITH “WHY”

“People don’t buy what you do—they buy why you do it”

Emotions drive decisions—data justifies them

Purpose > policy details

Start with values, end with validation

WHY DATA MATTERS IN ADVOCACY

01

Data is crucial for highlighting the value of higher education.

02

It helps in crafting narratives that resonate with stakeholders, especially amidst budget challenges.

03

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04

Even when people don't care about data, they care about data.

When do we get in the weeds and when do we fly at 30,000 feet?

WHAT RESONATES?

THE DATA THAT SPEAKS TO MOST AUDIENCES

TYPES OF DATA THAT RESONATE



Enrollment trends and demographic shifts



Student success metrics (retention, graduation rates, completion)



Employment outcomes



Workforce alignment



Access and equity (Pell, first-gen, rural divide)



Savings to the state



Affordability and cost transparency



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WHERE'S THE DATA?

HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

Enrollment trends and demographic shifts

Student success metrics (retention, graduation rate, completion)

Employment outcomes

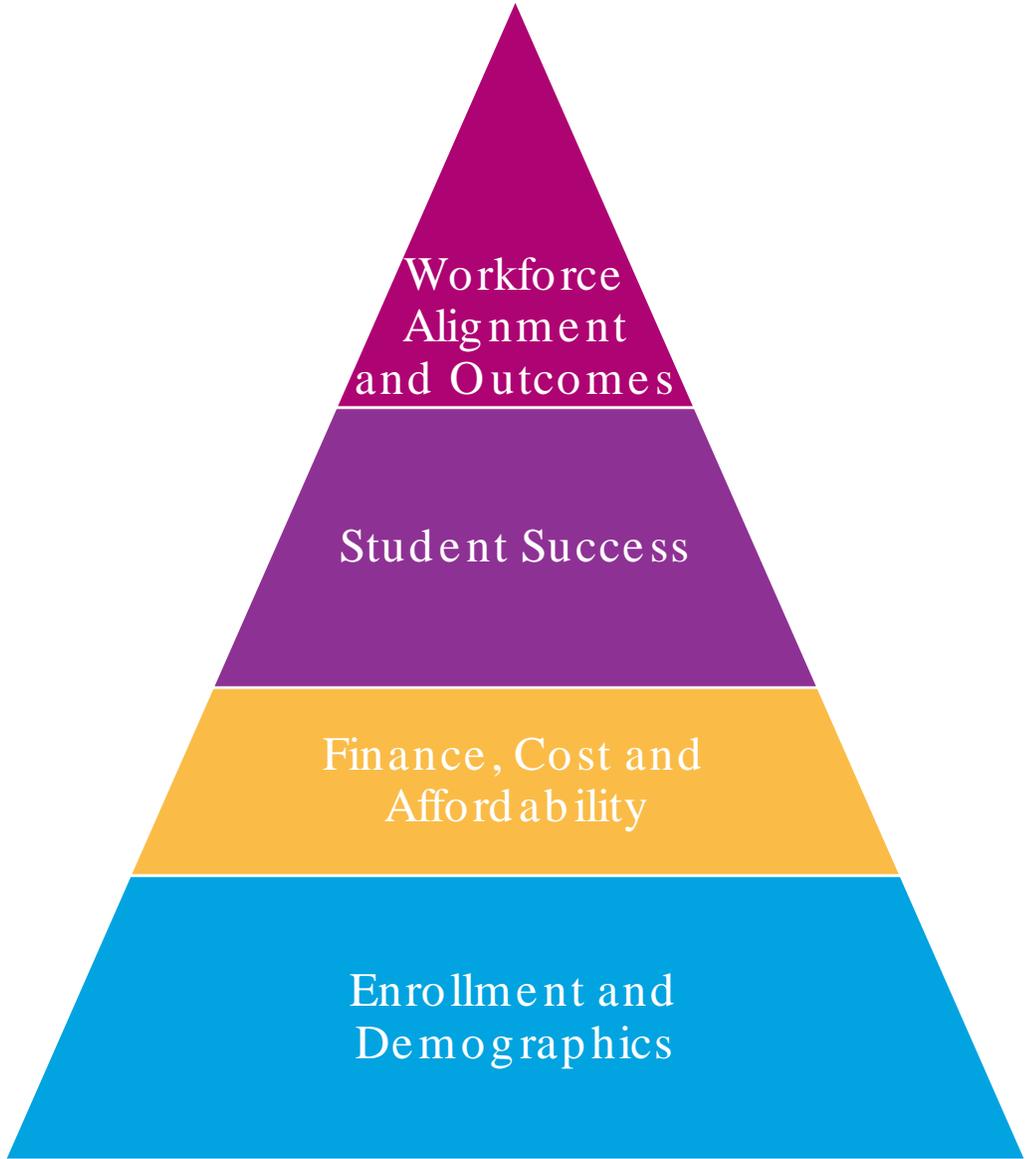
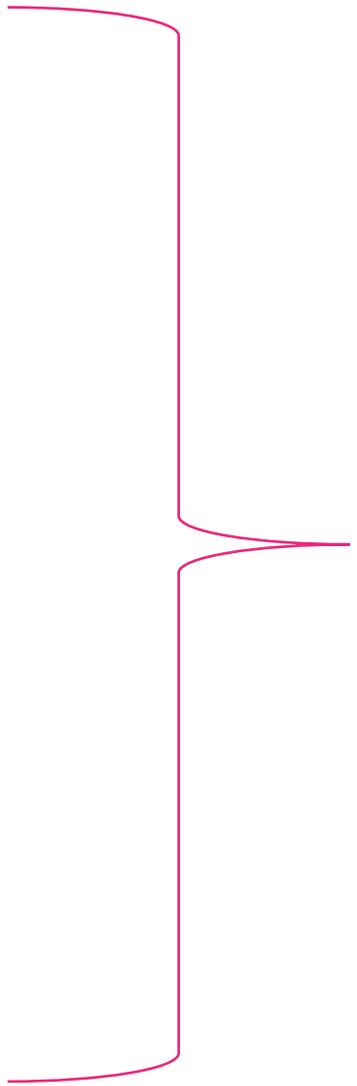
Workforce alignment

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Savings to the state

Affordability and cost transparency

Institutional and state-level economic impact



ENROLLMENT AND DEMOGRAPHICS

IPEDS/NCES: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>

IPEDS Net Migration:

<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/search/viewtable?tableId=36099&returnUrl=%2Fsearch>

WICHE Knocking at the College Door: <https://www.wiche.edu/knocking/>

Census: <https://www.census.gov/topics/education/educational-attainment.html>

Pell Institute: <https://www.pellinstitute.org/>

SHEEO SHEF State Profiles: <https://shef.sheeo.org/state-profile/georgia/>

SREB Fact Book: <https://www.sreb.org/fact-book-higher-education-0>

National Bureau of Economic Research: <https://www.nber.org/>

NCES DataLab: <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/>

FINANCE, COST AND AFFORDABILITY

State Appropriations: Varies by state

NACUBO: <https://www.nacubo.org/Research/2024/NACUBO-Tuition-Discounting-Study>

NCES DataLab NPSAS: <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/>

IPEDS: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>

CATC: <https://collegecost.ed.gov/>

FSA Federal Student Aid Data Center: <https://studentaid.gov/data-center>

College Scorecard: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>

TICAS: <https://ticas.org/ourwork/student-debt/>

CollegeBoard: <https://research.collegeboard.org/>

CollegeBoard Trends in College Pricing: <https://research.collegeboard.org/trends/college-pricing>

CollegeBoard Trends in Student Aid: <https://research.collegeboard.org/trends/student-aid>

FSA Data Center: <https://studentaid.gov/data-center>

InformedStates: <https://informedstates.org/data>

College Scorecard: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>

SHEEO SHEF: <https://shef.sheeo.org/data-downloads/>

STUDENT SUCCESS

IPEDES (Graduation Rates & Outcome Measures): <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>

National Student Clearinghouse: <https://nscresearchcenter.org/>

NSC PDP: <https://www.studentclearinghouse.org/solutions/ed-insights/pdp/>

College Scorecard: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>

Lumina Foundation Stronger Nation: <https://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/credentials-of-value>

TICAS Quick Facts: <https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Postsecondary-Attainment-Quick-Facts-August-2024.pdf>

WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT/OUTCOMES

State high demand job lists – map the SOC code to CIP codes of IPEDS Completions

College Scorecard: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>

Census PSEO: https://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/pseo_experimental.html

State SLDS Systems

Bureau of Labor Statistics: <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm> and <https://data.bls.gov/oesmap/>

CollegeBoard – Education Pays: <https://research.collegeboard.org/trends/education-pays>

NACE – First Destination Survey

O*Net OnLine: <https://www.onetonline.org/>

Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis: <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/>

SREB Fact Book on Higher Education: <https://www.sreb.org/fact-book-higher-education-0>

WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

TELL THE STORY

Advocacy = Facts + Framing + Why it Matters

Use data to:

- Clarify your value
- Support your ask
- Humanize your mission

Advocacy works best when:

- You start with why
- You show outcomes
- You center the student/community impact

Data Advocacy Checklist

- ✓ Did I start with “why”?
- ✓ Did I choose the right audience-specific data? Did the juice equal the effort of the squeeze?
- ✓ Did I keep the message visual and digestible? Was it consumable?
- ✓ Did I translate the statistics into impact?
- ✓ Did I tell a story? Did I address what they care about?

OUR VOICE. OUR VALUE. OUR DATA.

Higher education has a powerful story—and the data to prove it.

Our mission-driven education changes lives.

Our graduates fuel state economies and make the American Dream a possibility.

Our institutions are essential.

Let's keep telling that story

—with facts, with clarity, and with the “why” at the forefront.

THANK YOU!

CAROLYN SLOANE MATA, PH.D.

Email: carolyn.mata@icut.org

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/carolyn-mata-phd-1aa5b023/>

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