

EDITOR'S NOTES

As constituency demands for accountability in educational practices have grown, institutional researchers have become ever more involved in planning to improve institutional efficiency and effectiveness. Stakeholders create the blueprint for the planning process, and personnel from various units are strategically selected to address a wide array of objectives to reach institutional goals. We, the institutional researchers, have played the role of data stewards to present vital data and information at each stage of institutional planning. Increasingly, however, institutional researchers are being asked to provide information to decision makers in formats that are more useful for their work and to help guide them in the use of this information. How to arrange and convert data from different sources into effective tools for decision making is a challenge.

Given the significance of the issues discussed in the planning process, institutional researchers ensure that no data and information are overlooked. However, vast amounts of information that are presented in tables are often overwhelmingly detailed and compel refinement on behalf of stakeholders, such as retention rates by student type and semester, number of expected college-bound high school graduates by high school, or student credit hours produced by faculty type and academic programs, to name a few. It becomes necessary for institutional researchers to seek creative and systematic ways to introduce data as an effective aid that will lead to fruitful outcomes of decision making.

The chapters in this volume of *New Directions for Institutional Research* discuss alternative approaches and new directions to existing issues in the area of institutional planning. Rapid advancement in technologies, particularly in software programs and Web applications, allows us to process and present data and information we were not able to in even the recent past. The chapter authors are familiar with such software programs and Web applications and use them within the scope of their practice. Thus, this volume showcases innovative techniques developed by the chapter authors and unique planning experiences revolving around new technologies in the area of institutional research practice.

Chapter One, by Richard A. Voorhees, addresses mixed methods in institutional planning. Voorhees proposes the integration of quantitative and qualitative data in strategic planning and provides examples in the area of competitor analysis and enrollment projection. He also explores external data sources and their utility in his examples.

In Chapter Two, Patricia J. McClintock and Kevin J. G. Snider present a comprehensive case study of recruitment planning at a research-intensive institution. They discuss a systematic process to develop recruitment strategies using both quantitative and qualitative data. They detail organizational obstacles in changing institutional cultures and map new target areas for recruitment, as well as techniques for tracking potential students. In addition, they include decision-making tools such as real-time interactive programs and Web applications that were used in their recruitment efforts.

In Chapter Three, Christopher J. Maxwell discusses his planning experiences in implementing an institution-wide reporting system at a large research-intensive institution. He describes advantages of the SAS/IntrNet system over other alternatives and addresses the political and technical challenges encountered during the implementation process. Feedback and recommendations are provided for those who may be involved in the planning for new reporting system implementation.

Chapter Four discusses how an application of HTML serves as an effective tool to assist decision makers in using external data. Iryna Y. Johnson illustrates step-by-step an HTML application using Indiana high school data obtained from the Indiana Department of Education. This technique is also incorporated in the recruitment planning in Chapter Two by McClintock and Snider.

In Chapter Five, Douglas K. Anderson, Bridgett J. Milner, and Chris J. Foley discuss techniques to transform data and information into user-oriented formats. After illustrating effective displays in table format, they provide techniques to link admission data to geographical information, followed by simulation models that they developed to project institutional enrollment by ability and admission standards.

Yonghong Jade Xu and I describe an application of Bayesian belief network (BBN) for institutional type classification in Chapter Six. We first discuss methodological advantages of BBN over traditional statistical techniques, followed by an example of BBN analysis. Using the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF: 04) data set, we examine an array of institutional characteristics and their impact on an institution's disposition in Carnegie classification. The chapter, which focuses on the utility of the study results, illustrates an interactive program that allows one to observe how changes in parameter values affect the classification.

Chapter Seven explores a longitudinal approach to student departure modeled to assist in institutional retention efforts. Intervention strategies to reduce student attrition rates are more effective when timing of students at risk of departure is known. I compare studies that evolved around existing retention theories and ones in which dimensions of departure timing are incorporated and present examples of real-time interactive tools to display departure risks of students over time.

In the final chapter, I highlight a few thoughts for each chapter. While each contributing author in this volume has a unique background and role

in institutions of higher education, such as administrators, consultants, programmers, researchers, and scholars, we all share one common thread in our practice: data and research findings drive institutional planning. We are also concerned that data and research findings are used in the most effective way. As a result, we search for inventive means to improve the utility of data and information we provide. I hope that these chapters will stimulate readers to seek creative approaches to support institutional planning.

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