**On Facilitating the USE of Institutional Research Data**

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*“You can’t take folk where they don’t want to go.”*

Those wise words came back to me when I started thinking about the conundrum of institutional researchers providing data to college and university administrators, only to later learn of a policy or decision seemingly not in keeping with that data. While my cousin’s wise words caution us not to waste efforts on a lost cause, for those of us in the Institutional Research and Assessment world, it is indeed our job to take people where they may not want to go – or perhaps don’t know that they need to go.

I started down this path in preparation for a recent invited presentation on the role of institutional research in assessment. The more I researched the question, looking for ways that these two sometimes unified (conceptually and on institutional organizational charts) sometimes independent endeavors overlap, the more it seemed that the issue was one of use. That is, we know the data is there, but we also know it is not always sought, understood and ultimately used. As Johnson et al. (2014) put it, “A fundamental goal of student learning assessment in higher education is to use student learning evidence in decision making to improve educational programs.” That can’t happen without the use of appropriate data, generally provided by our offices of institutional research – regardless of the official name of that unit.

Of course there are situations in which we, the IR professionals, don’t know all of the factors influencing administrative decisions. We must acknowledge that what might seem like a dismissal of pertinent data might in reality only be a part of the puzzle. But, for our focus here, highlighting ways to make data more useful and more accessible can only be a benefit.

Toward that end, we’d like to invite you to share your best practices in response to the following three questions:

* What techniques or approaches have you used to communicate data-rich information in a way that is accessible to college and university administrators?
* In the face of complex, data-rich results, how do you decide what to emphasize in your data summaries? How does the potential audience impact that decision?
* What advice do you have on sharing data that are not likely to be popular at your institution?

Please go to: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/X98J532> and share your insights and experiences.

Reference

Johnson, J.L., Guetterman, T. & Thompson, R.J. (2014). An integrated model of influences: Use of assessment data in higher education. Research & Practice in Assessment, 9, 18-30. Retrieved from <http://www.rpajournal.com/dev/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/A1.pdf>

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