Stepping Outside the Office to Enhance the Visibility of Institutional Research

CAIR 2015
Chris Cullander

Increased campus visibility is a goal shared by most IR offices - why?

- Visibility is key to IR being
  - Seen as the best source for data, analysis & assessment
  - Part of discussions about data ownership and governance
  - Considered when new IR-related needs emerge
  - Successful in competition for resources

How it all began (5 years ago): How many other IR people were WASC ALOs?

- WASC 'Key Personnel' listing -14% of ALOs were IR or assessment
- Many also had campus roles outside their 'normal' scope of duties
- These 'outside roles' served to raise the visibility of IR at their institution
- Also found some approaches to 'regular' IR work that raised visibility

Potential downsides of increasing visibility

- Some IR people prefer low visibility
- Out of comfort zone
- Potential for being used
- May result in increased workload – but
  - Additional workload almost inevitable
  - Can potentially be selective &
  - Build case for more resources

Some upsides

- Form of professional development
- May be able to obtain release time
- Increases value to institution
- Builds professional network & skill sets
- Leads to opportunities for promotions or new jobs

'Out of the office' roles research

- LinkedIn profiles & online CVs/bios of institutional researchers
- 'Key personnel' in WSCUC institutional listings (ALO & now, Director of IR)
  - ACCJC does not display this information
- Conversations with colleagues
- Experience
- Found huge variety of such roles

Illustrative example: serving on the IRB (aka the CHR)

- IRB - Institutional Review Board, CHR - Committee on Human Research
- Campus-level committee, reviews all research concerning human subjects
- Some types of survey research require IRB approval
- Committee benefits from someone actually trained in assessment
- IR people are members, guests, and in some instances Chairs of IRB/CHR

Some considerations…

- IRB membership may require faculty position (but not for observer, consultant, guest, etc. role)
- Assessment role may be filled by faculty expert (potential conflict of interest?)
- Too much effort required? (how many meetings per month, and for how long?)

Investigating this possibility

- Learn about the IRB at your institution & qualifications for serving on it
- Know any IRB members? Explore possibility, get introduction.
- Ask if you can be an observer or guest
- Attend meetings - see if a good fit for you
- Be sure that role, time commitment, term (1-2 years?), etc. are clear

Assessment in Program Review

- In addition to the 'facts & figures' -
- Undergraduate programs: Student perceptions of their degree program at various stages
- Graduate academic programs often need help with assessment for program review,
- And for application for/renewal of training grants (now required in many cases)

Other roles for assessment

- Partnership/collaboration with units that aren't typically IR clients
  - Campus library – CIRP and NSSE have units related to libraries
  - Student health – satisfaction with services
- Outcomes assessment of non-academic & co-curricular programs
- Results often used for budget proposals

Leverage training and skill sets as Adjunct faculty

- Statistics
- Quantitative methods
- Educational assessment
- Information technology
- Survey methods
- As well as degree subjects, e.g.
  - Psychology
  - Educational technology
  - Resource management

Workshops and training for faculty, staff, and students

- Basics of assessment & survey research
- FERPA training for researchers who want to work with student data
- Presentations on what IR, analytics, & assessment are (and their value) to Board of Trustees

Ex-officio or permanent guest status on Academic Senate committees

- Educational Policy – reviews new programs, which usually require Substantive Change approval
- Assessment - Programmatic learning outcomes
- Curriculum – reviews new courses, and learning outcomes for them
- Diversity – R-E-G data

Membership on/advisor to campus-level committees

- IRB/CHR
- Continuity of operations (protection of data resources in a disaster)
- Strategic Planning – data for decisions
- Student Success and Assessment
- Institutional Learning Outcomes

Accreditation

- Track programs whose courses are going online - 50% is tipping point for SubChange
- Serve as member of accreditation review team for WSCUC or ACCJC
  - Presentation Friday am by WSCUC VP
  - Caution: the Assistant Chair writes the report!
- IR Director as ALO – work towards this by becoming the campus accreditation expert
  - Currently, **33**% of WSCUC ALOs are IR/IE/ Assessment (up from 14%) – CAOs also 33%
  - ALO is Campus lead for Substantive Change, new Programs & Affirmation of Accreditation

Other IR efforts that raise visibility

- Database of key faculty (staff, student) honors and awards (Public Affairs)
- Attribution - put your name on it
- Meet your clients – what IR is, & what more can you do for them?
- Unique angles on standard reports, e.g.
  - Entering class stats: how many twins, how many Feb 29th birthdays, furthest birthplace.

Creative fun with a difficult task

- WASC – evidence of campus engagement in accreditation review ('what is WASC?')
- Concordia U – 'The WASC Games' - email campaign by IR + social media team
  - Three emails with short fill in the blank 'games'
  - Departments='Districts', prize
  - Answers in Institutional Report
  - Tracked emails opened & clicks
  on Report; participation >> goal

Getting started – take control (rather than having new jobs happen to you)

- Identify opportunities on your campus
- Determine which might be a good fit
- Clarify your potential role and extent of participation before committing
- Build towards a goal

Be sure to

- Do your research – time required, skill fit
- Consult with supervisor & colleagues
- Test run if possible
- Commit for a limited time

And most important -

- Have an 'elevator speech' prepared about what IR is (and is not)