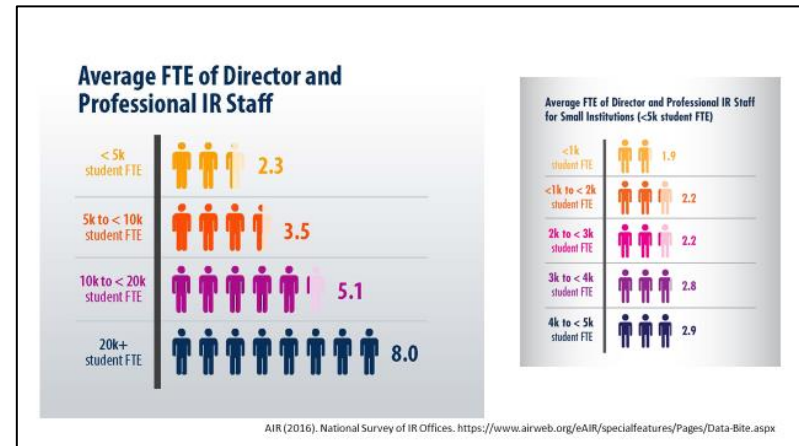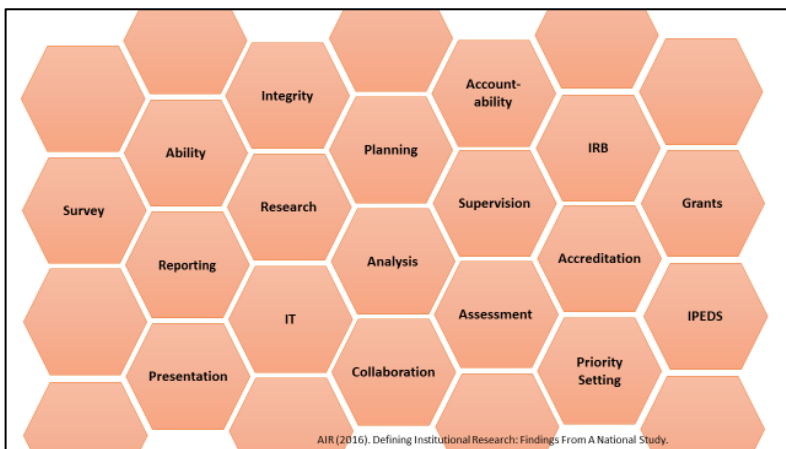# Institutional Research Behind the Scenes

Jeanette Gurrola Baez
Claremont Graduate University
2016 CAIR Conference

Working at a small private institution, sometimes it's hard to get a grasp on how our office compares to others in terms of things such as workload and staffing. AIR's most recent national survey of IR offices has provided some valuable information in regards to staffing benchmarks. The average number of professional staff in an IR office naturally increases as the size of the student population increases. Providing greater insight, a disaggregated graph shows the average staff size for smaller institutions. Claremont Graduate University has a student FTE of about 1100. The average IR staff FTE of 2.2 is an accurate reflection of our office at CGU.

However, these graphs do not take into consideration the positions outside of the IR office which function in an IR capacity. These are the analysts embedded within the undergraduate studies division, graduate studies division, student services, financial aid, admissions, assessment, etc. The realistic picture of the number of IR staff would probably look like this. At smaller institutions, this is often not the case.

Average FTE of Director and Professional IR Staff

Student FTE	Average FTE
< 5k student FTE	2.3
5k to < 10k student FTE	3.5
10k to < 20k student FTE	5.1
20k+ student FTE	8.0

Average FTE of Director and Professional IR Staff for Small Institutions (<5k student FTE)

Student FTE	Average FTE
<1k student FTE	1.9
<1k to < 2k student FTE	2.2
2k to < 3k student FTE	2.2
3k to < 4k student FTE	2.8
4k to < 5k student FTE	2.9

AIR (2016). National Survey of IR Offices. https://www.airweb.org/eAIR/specialfeatures/Pages/Data-Bite.aspx

Integrity, Account-ability, Ability, Planning, IRB, Survey, Research, Supervision, Grants, Reporting, Analysis, Accreditation, IT, Assessment, IPEDS, Presentation, Collaboration, Priority Setting

AIR (2016). Defining Institutional Research: Findings From A National Study.

The challenge is that no matter what size of institution you're at and the size of your office, we are all performing many of the same tasks to one degree or another. From external reporting to supporting internal decision making, the lists of tasks we perform no doubt keep us busy.

IR CAPACITY BUILDING

Building the function of institutional research by providing coaching and professional development across the institution in a purposeful and intentional process that increases capacity for data-informed decisions to permeate the institution.

AIR's Aspirational Practice for Institutional Research.

Realities of Capacity Building

1. CB requires a broad stakeholder base
2. CB requires a broad-based demand
3. Demand and purpose must be matched
4. CB operates on many levels
5. CB requires many methods
6. CB lacks resources
7. CB must be flexible
8. CB requires relationship building

Stockdill, S. H., Baizerman, M., Compton, D. W. (2002). Toward a definition of the ECB process: A conversation with the ECB literature. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 93, 7-25.

Like many other institutions, there has been an increase in the demand for data to inform decision making at CGU in addition to a growing request of data from external agencies. In an effort to manage workload and to make data available in a timely manner, institutional research behind the scenes for me has been to increase the institutional research capacity of the institution beyond our 2.2 staff FTE.

Tying in AIRs Aspirational Practice for Institutional Research, this directly heeds the call for offices to build the function of institutional research by providing coaching and professional development across the institution in a purposeful and intentional process that increases capacity for data-informed decisions to permeate the institution.

There are clearly many benefits to increasing institutional research capacity, such as putting data in the hands of decision makers, increasing the use of data, and increasing the validity and reliability of data. However, there are several realities to capacity building that are not often thought of.

1. Capacity building requires a broad stakeholder base. It entails working across departments and working with various stakeholders. By engaging a broad stakeholder base, it helps create a new culture where working with and using data is the norm.

2. Capacity building requires broad based demand. If there is no demand to build capacity, then training staff will be challenging. Capacity building is fueled by the desire to want to learn new things, but also by the need to learn new things. It's helping staff who are trying to identify a group of students that can be best serviced by new programming. It's capitalizing on the instances where staff have been tasked to gather and summarize data and subtly strengthening their skills in the process. To help increase demand, I've had to learn to phrase things in a way that staff easily see what's in it for them if they participate. The successes obtained during this period helps build confidence and curiosity with data. It has also helped me form stronger relationships

with staff.

3. To be effective, training provided should match staff needs. Incorporating data staff use frequently and providing training that's relevant to their data needs are key when trying to get staff's attention and participation. It is important to keep a pulse on staff needs, as they may change over time. However, there are also times where needs do not change and you must be patient with re-educating staff.

4. Capacity building is done on multiple levels, ranging from training for day to day operations to big picture data collection and analyses. It can be as simple as teaching someone how to use VLOOKUP to teaching select staff on how to create their own queries.

5. Capacity building requires many methods. Not everyone has the same learning style. Using various pedagogical practices is necessary. We currently provide hands on group training and group lectures, individual training, create handouts, and at times function like a help desk. Additionally, the resources we develop are housed in a community portal where staff can access them at any time.

6. Because capacity building is an ongoing process, it can lack financial and human resources. It's important to plan and set priorities for the year so that you can keep the momentum of capacity building going. When financial resources have been limited, we've opted to bring in trainers to our campus versus sending staff to external training which can cost more as you're paying per person. Taking stock of staff, faculty, and student's expertise is a way to approach lack of human resources. I've found that many are willing to step up and share their expertise with others.

7. Capacity building is very context dependent. You must be cognizant of the culture of the department you are working with and technical skills of staff. Flexibility is important when dealing with resources, training methods, level of capacity building, and satisfying demand.

8. And lastly, but most importantly, capacity building requires relationship building. Establishing relationships with staff and faculty across campus aids capacity building because of the trust and rapport that is built. One way I have built relationships across campus is by working with the various owners of data. As we know, collecting and analyzing data cannot be done in isolation. To

fully understand data we query from our student information system or that we receive from departments, I consult with the content experts across the campus. These relationships have afforded me the ability to directly provide staff feedback and suggestions about their data, processes, and their methods for working with the data. I consistently offer to help with whatever feedback or suggestion I have provided, and I jump on any opportunity that presents itself to teach someone new things.

For those of that are looking to build institutional research capacity, I hope this provides you with a framework for implementation. Although IR capacity building is something that may not be found in our job descriptions, it is a worthwhile endeavor as it helps to increase the effectiveness of the office by providing our stakeholders the tools to make more and better use of data for decision making.

References

AIR (2016). [Graphs illustrating the average FTE of director and professional IR staff]. *National Survey of Institutional Research Offices*. Retrieved from https://www.airweb.org/eAIR/specialfeatures/Pages/Data-Bite.aspx

Lillibridge, F., Swing, R. L., Jones, D., and Ross, L. E. (2016). *Defining Institutional Research: Findings From A National Study of IR Work Tasks*. Association for Institutional Research, Tallahassee, Florida. Retrieved from http://www.airweb.org/Resources/IRStudies/Pages/Defining-IR-Focus-on-Senior-Leaders.aspx

Stockdill, S. H., Baizerman, M., and Compton, D. W. (2002). Toward a definition of the ECB process: A conversation with the ECB literature. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 93, 7-25.

Swing, R. L., and Ross, L. E. (2016). *Statement of Aspirational Practice for Institutional Research*. Association for Institutional Research, Tallahassee, Florida. Retrieved from http://www.airweb.org/aspirationalstatement.