Hello, and welcome to our presentation of "Rubber meeting the Road: Aspirational Practice in one IR Office."

CAIR 2016
Rubber meeting the Road: Aspirational Practice in one IR Office

About the University of California, Irvine

- Association of American Universities member
- Established in 1965.
- 87 undergraduate degree programs, 59 master's, and 46 Ph.D. programs, with over 8,700 degrees awarded in 2014-15.
- Over 30,000 students and more than 15,000 non-student employees.

- Ranked #1 in 2015 by *The New York Times* among U.S. universities that do the most for low-income students; our undergraduates are 29% URM, 50% 1st generation, and 35% low-income.
- A four year graduation rate of over 70%.
- Ranked in the top 10 of public universities by *U.S. News & World Report*

UCI Office of Institutional Research

First, for those not familiar with UCI, we are: one of 62 institutions in the Association of American Universities, an association of leading public and private research universities in the United States and Canada. We are relatively young, being established in 1965, with a large mix of undergraduate and graduate programs. We are recognized for our contribution to social mobility and successful outcomes for our students and are ranked in the top 10 public universities by US News.

This presentation is a try at something new… as each of us explores the "IR Statement of Aspirational Practice" from our own experiences within the profession. Hopefully this presentation will be a little different and a little fun!

Maybe even a little "mad" from the perspective of your normal "institutional research presentation," but…

We are an institution with an Anteater as its mascot, so maybe a little madness is just part of our nature…

A little about us, we have a range of experiences and time in institutional research, from over 30 years to just over 5 months. I am Ryan Cherland, and with me today are colleagues from UC Irvine, Ryan Hoadwonic, Joshua Saldana, and Randy Bautista.

I'm not sure about you, but when I first saw the email on Aspirational Practice, I was a little cynical, feeling a little "not one of these, what is this all about?...., I've been around too long…" But, I let that grouchy-old-guy-part-of-me have his say, and then moved on and read the statement.

CAIR 2016
Rubber meeting the Road: Aspirational Practice in one IR Office

A STATEMENT OF ASPIRATIONAL PRACTICE FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

This vision represents a hybrid approach for IR that recognizes student success as one of several critical aspects of higher education.

The aspirational statement highlights the need for IR to:
- To serve a broader range of decision makers,
- To expand IR capacity through professional development of data skills,
- To have chief-level leadership for an institution's data strategy and resources.

From http://www.airweb.org

UCI Office of Institutional Research

For those of you not familiar with the statement, you can find the specific details on AIR's website, but some of the key points are:
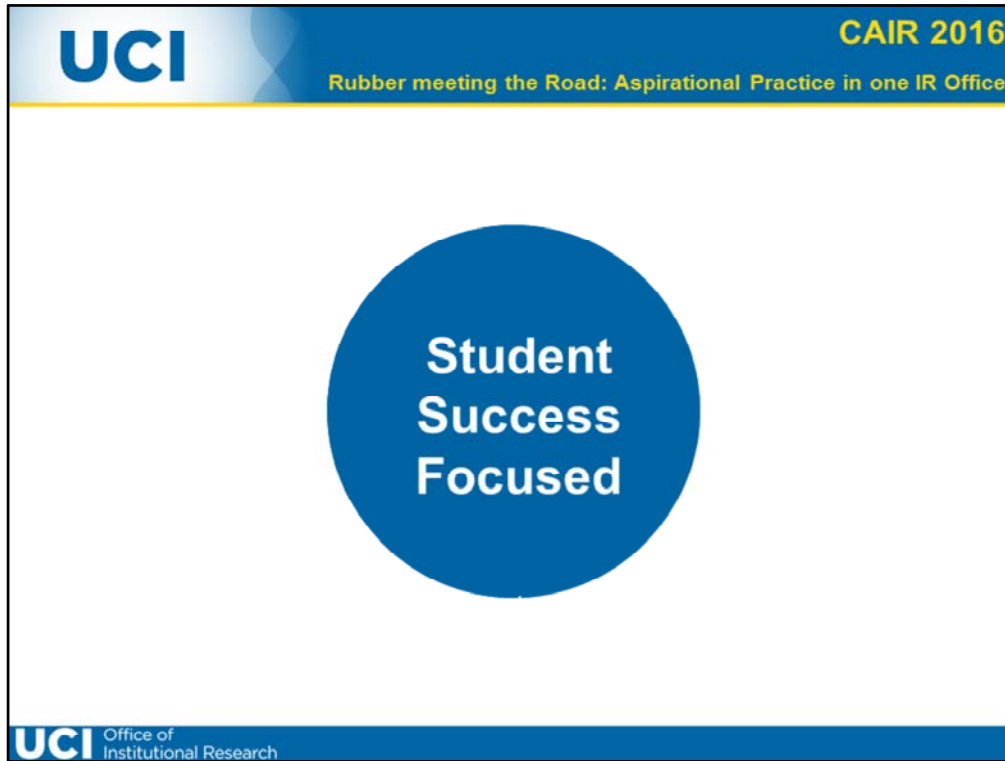
That it reminds us all that Student Success is a critical aspect of higher education's mission.

That we have a broad range of decision makers that we need to support other than our immediate leadership, including students, faculty, and staff.

That we should be prepared to expand our institution's IR capacity throughout the institution.
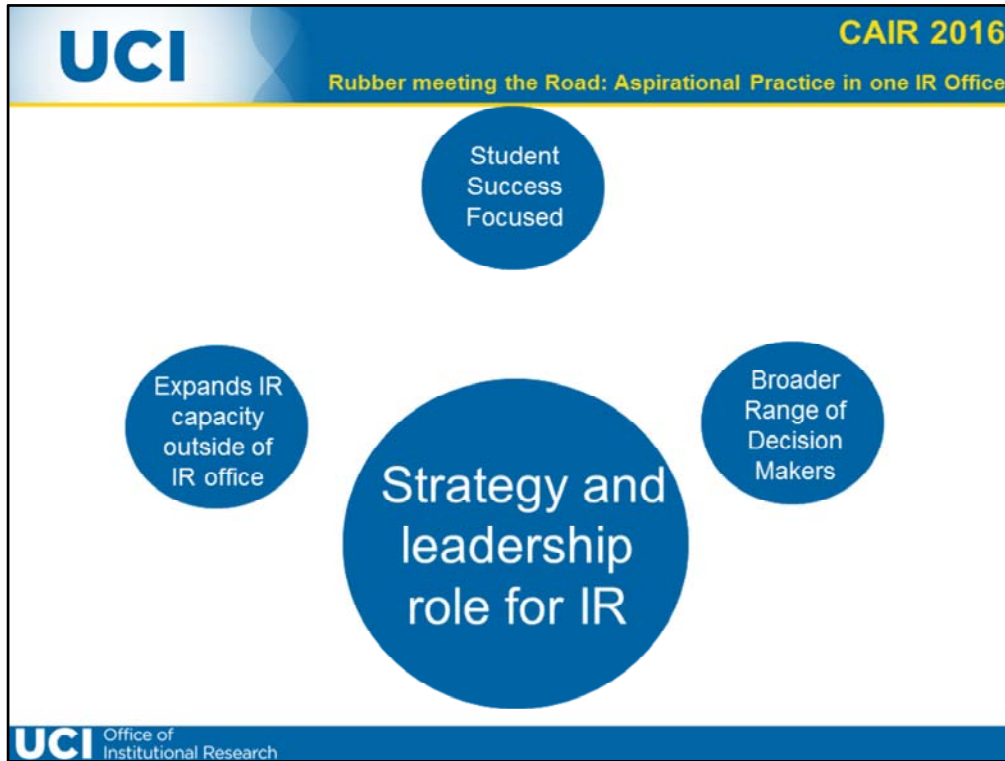
And that we should do so thoughtfully and mindfully, we should have a strategy to advocate for IR capabilities to grow across the institution.

How do these ideas fit my experiences?
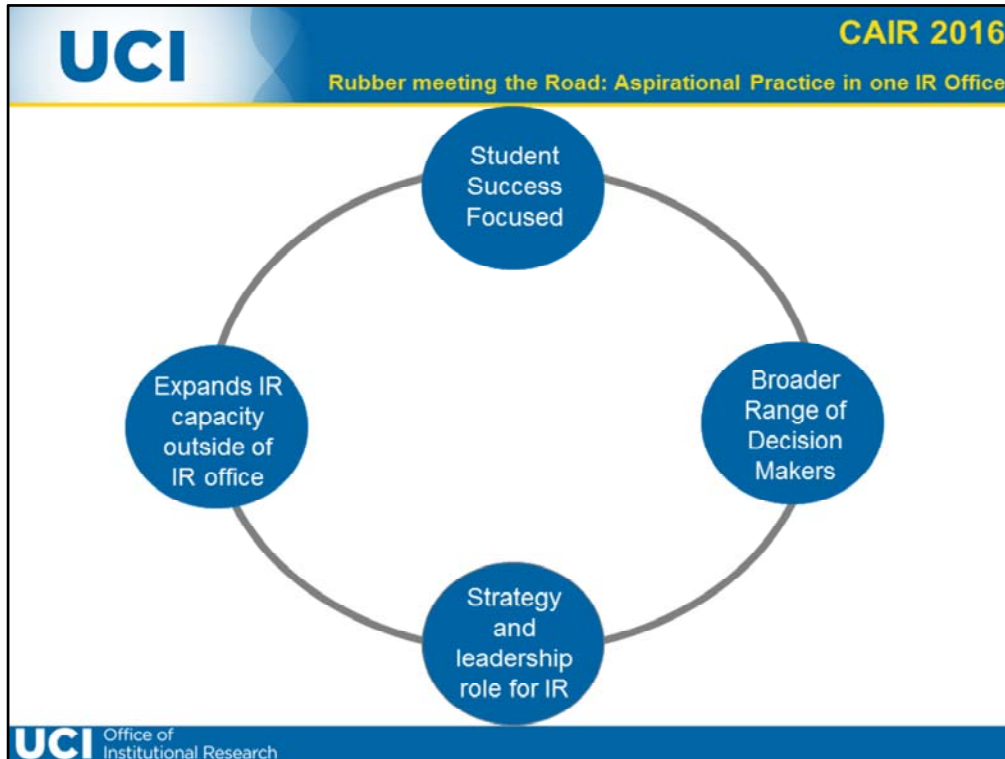
How do they work together? How do these ideas fit with the experiences of others in my office? Do these ideas fit with my plans and goals for Institutional Research at my institution? I have had the fortune of working in institutional research for several decades with several different institutions. There are a few key themes that have I developed over the years. If we are doing our jobs right there is seldom…
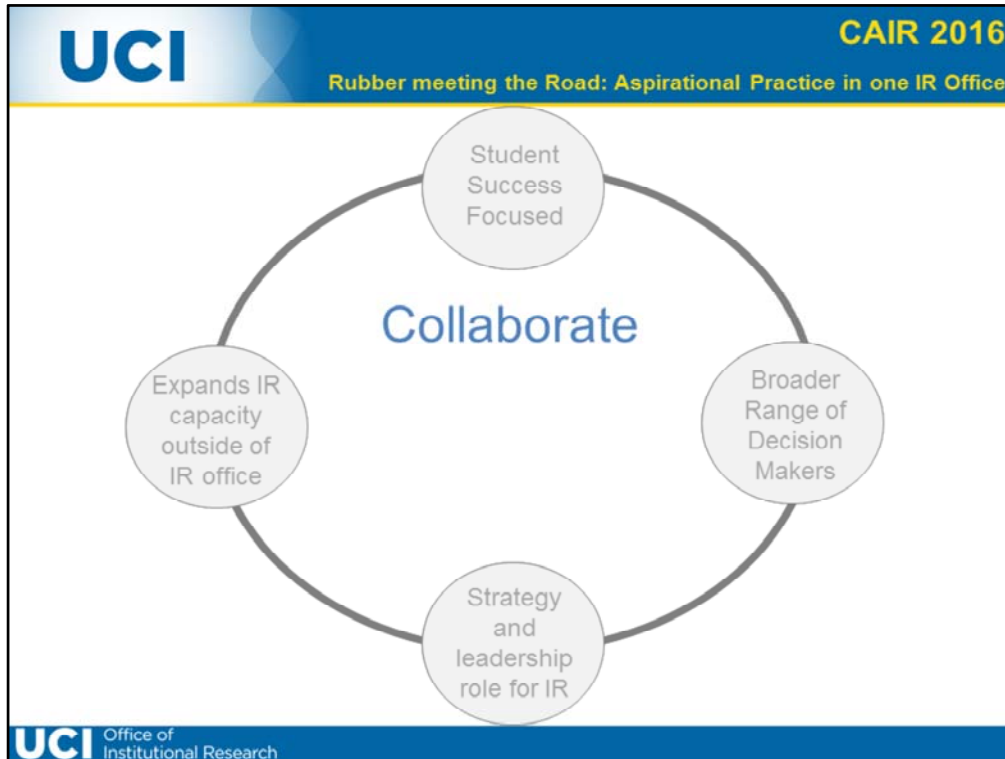
A lack of work and information needs at our institutions – one needs to embrace collaboration to spread the work load as well as develop IR's engagement on campus. There will be workgroups and there will be committees that will feel like a waste of time, but no time is wasted if you build a network of colleagues on your campus, listen for the information needs of others on your campus, and advocate for the use of data to inform decisions on your campus. Being at the table, even if it is you serving the table, will never be for naught if you mindfully engage the collaboration. So how does this useful internal observation fit into the statement of aspirational practice?
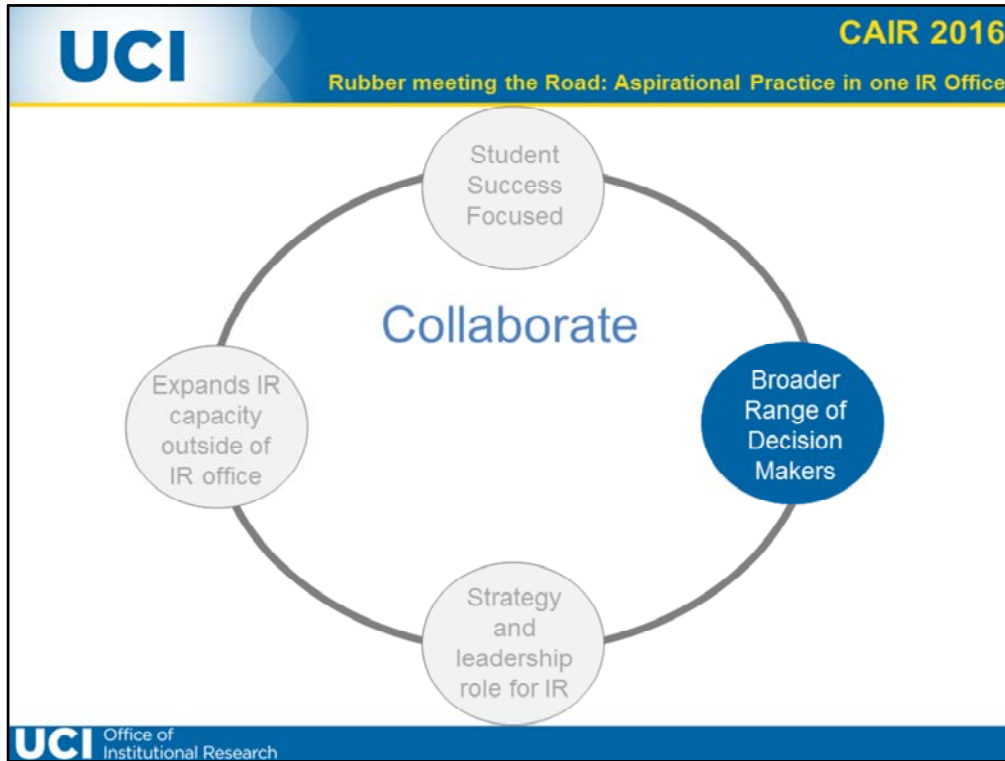
If I am collaborating, I am working with others on campus, helping them focus their questions, and providing them with information from our systems. I am helping them understand the results, and they are providing me additional context in those results during the discussion. Collaboration helps decision-making on campus.
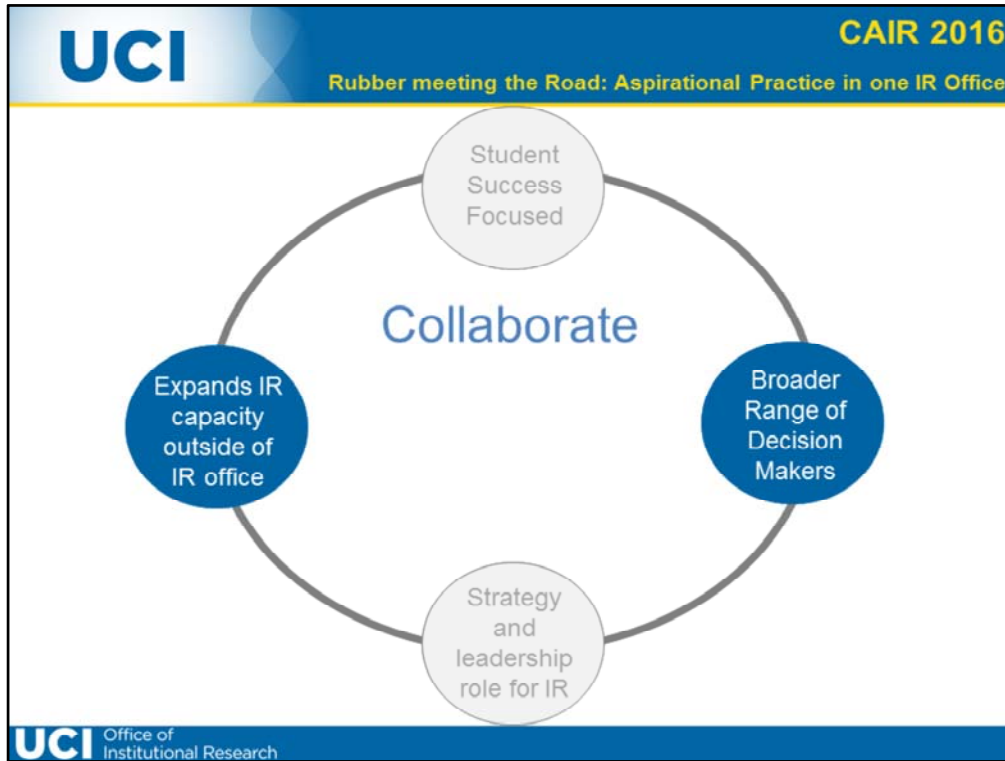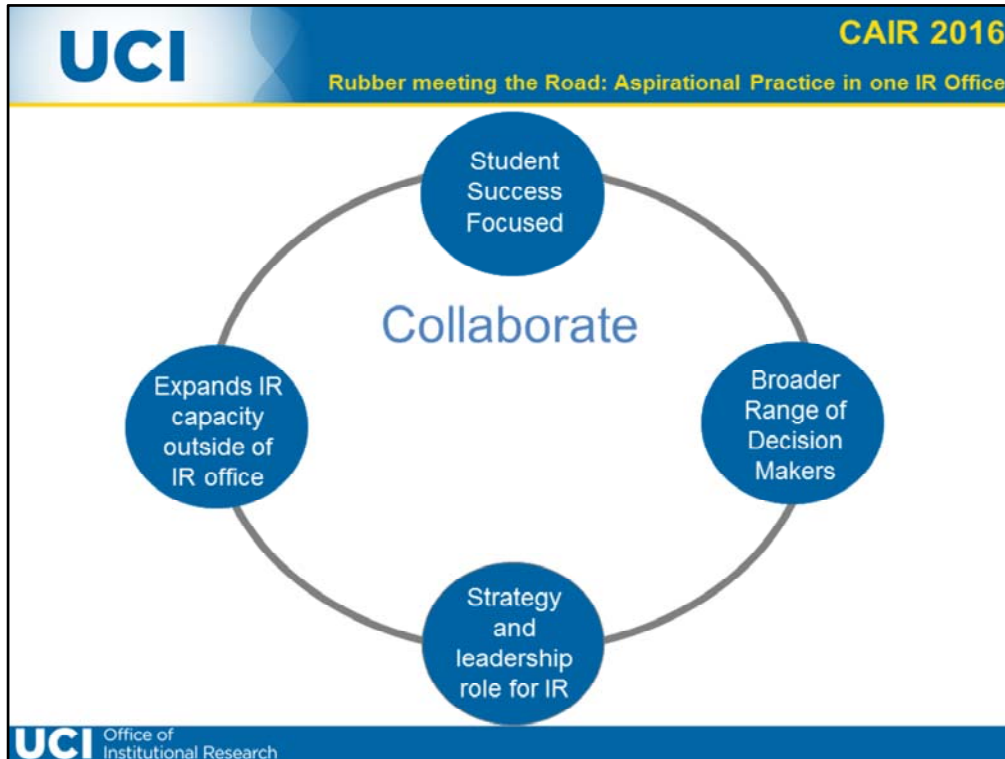
If I am collaborating, I am connecting other offices with our data resources, and building out our data resources and reporting systems to put more tools in the hands of others, while they do their jobs and make more data informed decisions.
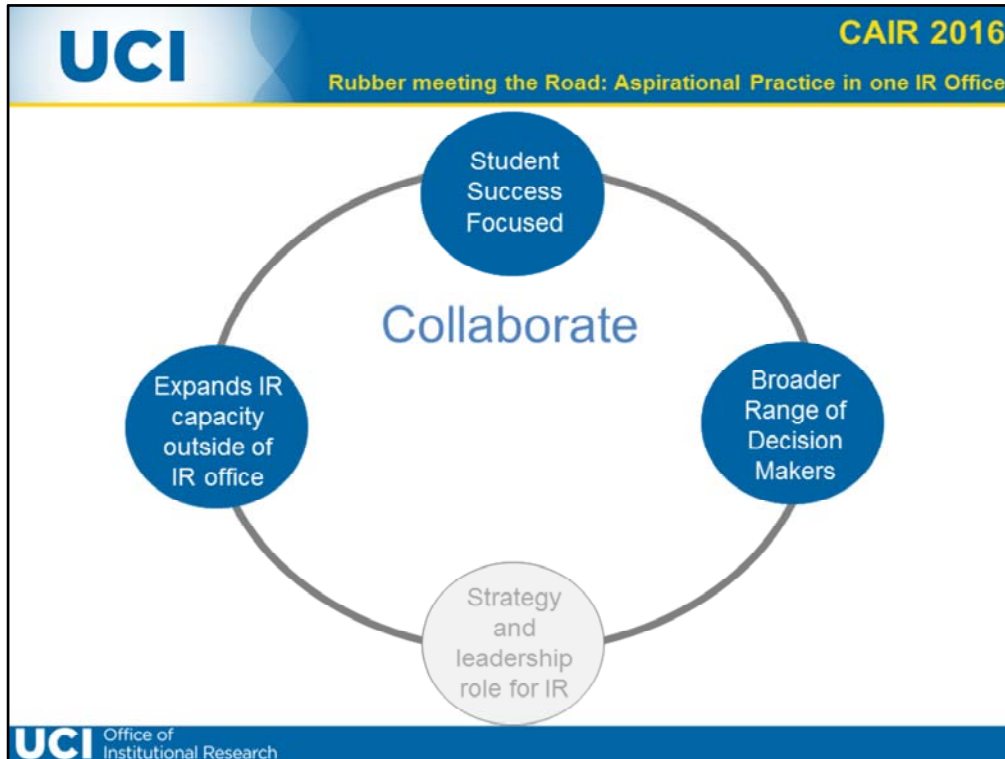
If I am collaborating, I am learning more about how students are making their way through their programs, and what programs are in place to help them, and how well they work. I am learning how our advisors do their jobs, and what information would make their jobs more effective.

If I am collaborating, I am thinking about my role on campus as well as the role of institutional research on campus, and how what we do needs to be promoted and have advocates to help my institution make better decisions.
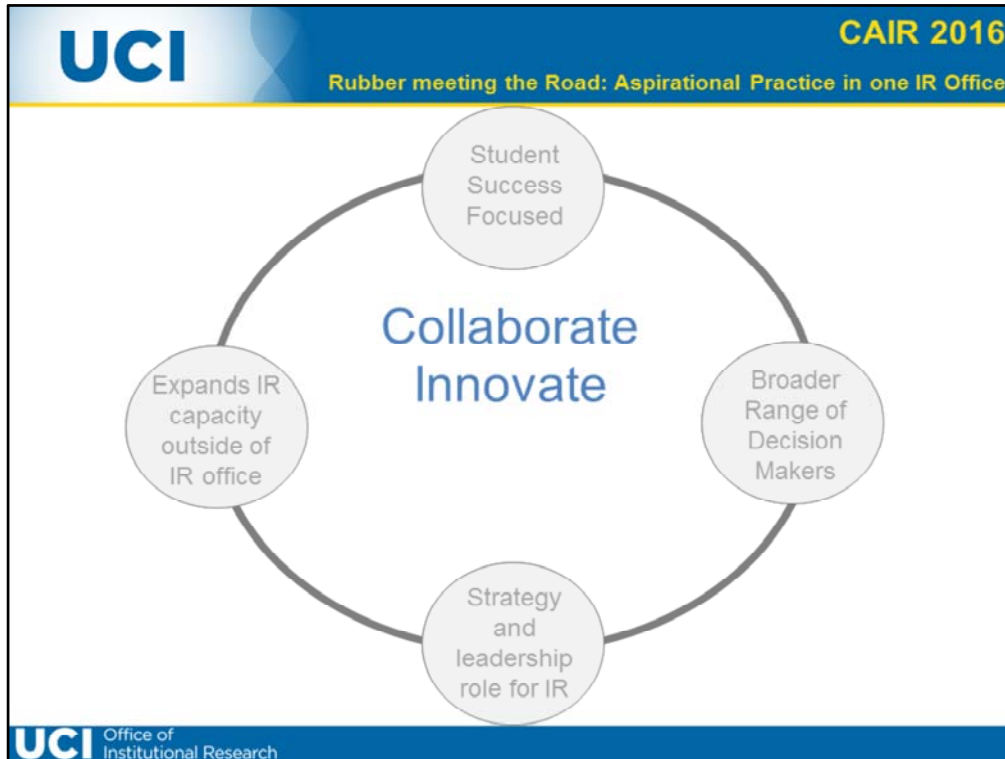
The second thing that I have noted is that there are seldom new technologies and seldom new approaches to how we our work, that do not have usefulness – embracing new innovations will be helpful in making one's office productive. During my professional time, at one point or another, there was always something that was a new "thing." Some of my new technical things in my time have been: personal computers, networks, email, spreadsheets, the internet, HTML, SQL, … the list can go on and on. This doesn't mean you have to be on the bleeding edge of every new thing, but be open and prepared for change and nurture innovation in yourself and in your colleagues toward your approaches to your work. Faculty Salary studies are Faculty Salary studies, but I'd rather being doing them using databases and software than punching in numbers on a 10 key calculator from the printed budget.
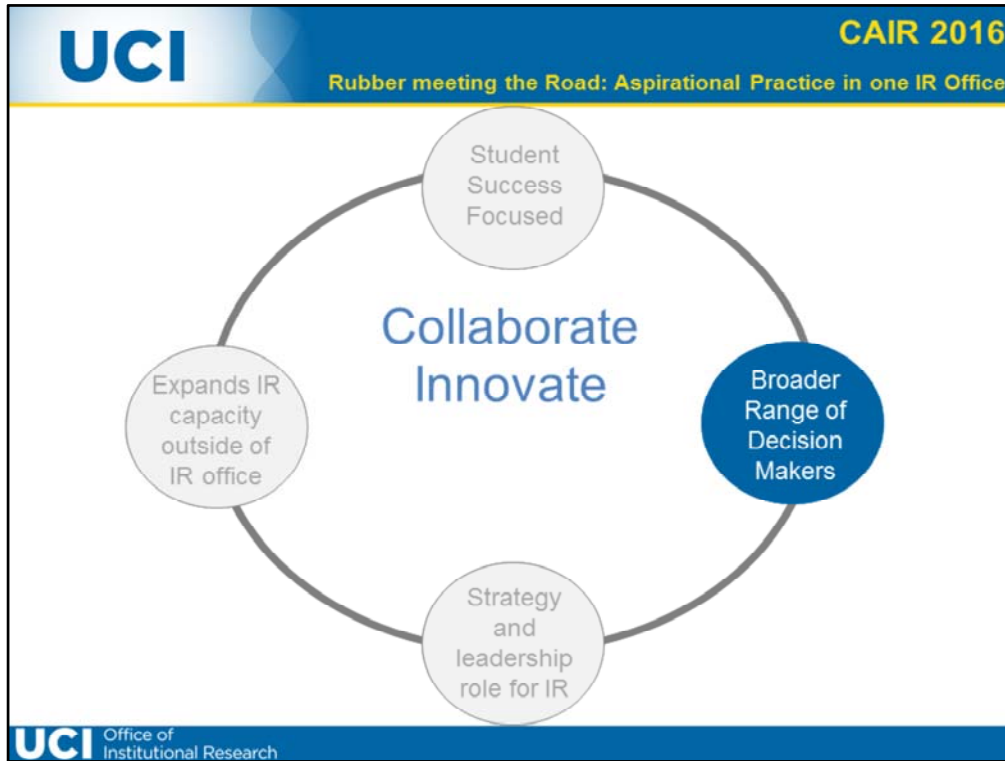
If I am innovating, I am working to put the tools for helping informing decisions in various hands throughout the campus, looking to find ways to let individuals dig into the details of some pattern or result that seems new. So that they can find answers on their own, while my office works on other projects and answers, because there has never been a lack of things to do...
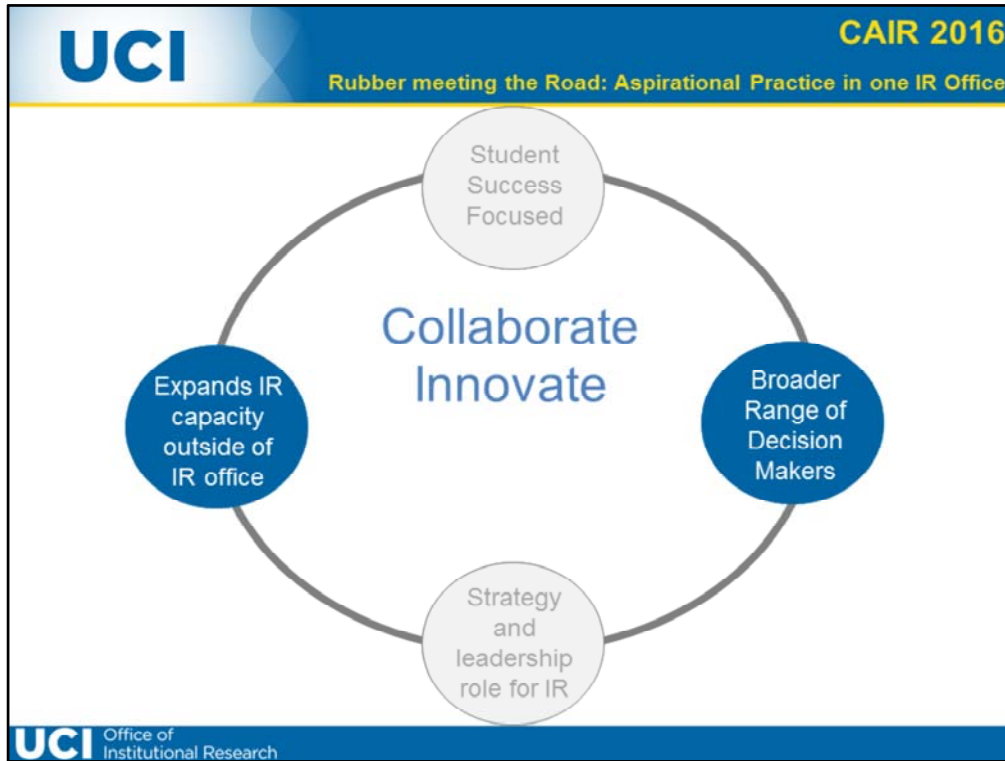
If I am innovating, I am making sure that the data and the skills to work with data are being developed outside of my office. That there are secure, scalable, and manageable ways for access to our data stores to be made available to others.
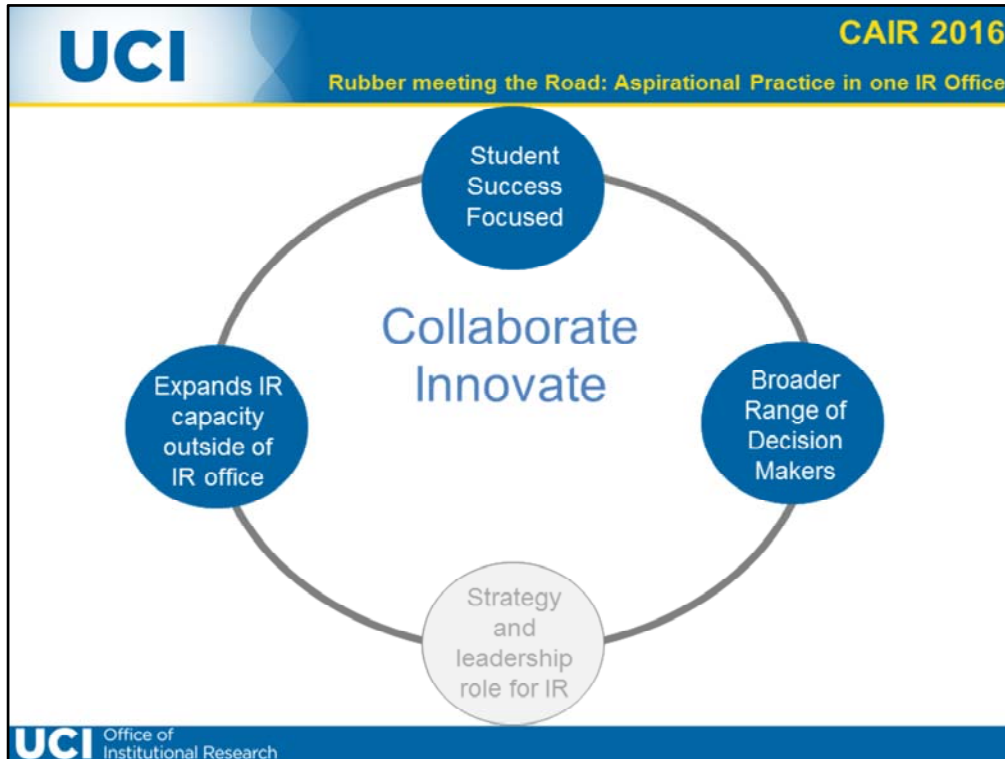
If I am innovating, I am understanding how all this data we sit on can help us understand the segments of our student populations that will struggle, and the ways in which the campus might be able to help. Whether it is academically related or financially related, or connected with personal challenges, we are now in a position to tie a lot of threads together that can help us proactively connect support services to students sooner than later.
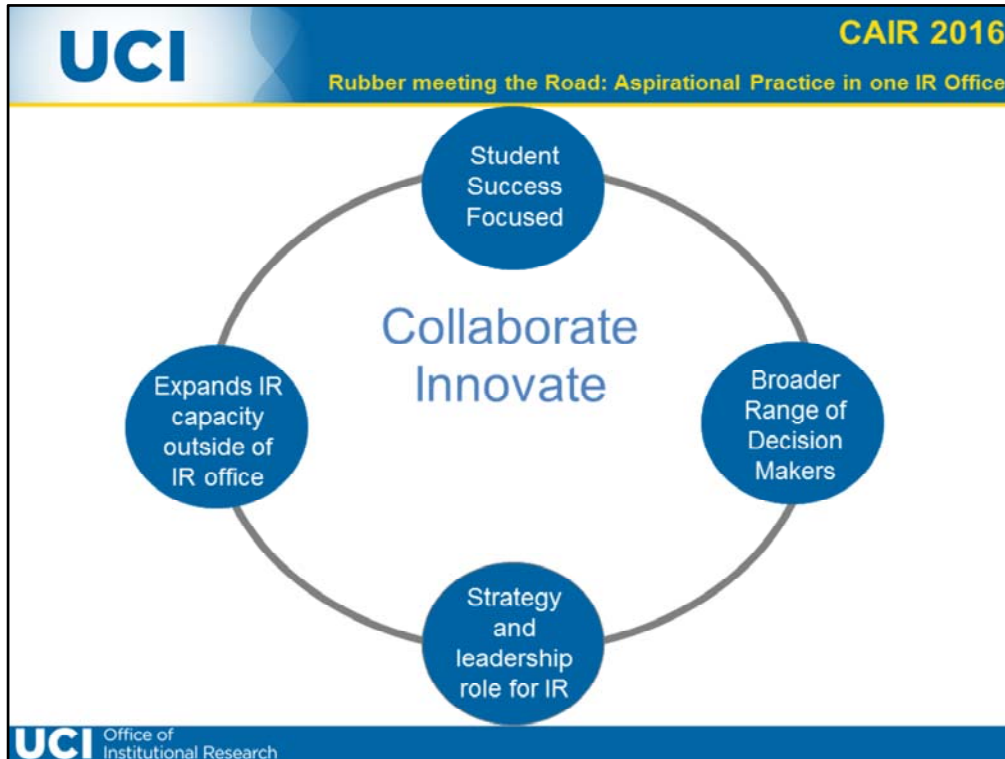
If I am innovating, I am helping institutional research on campus be viewed as something useful and up-to-date. We need to be opened to looking at things in a new way and with a new set of eyes so that we are supporting decision making on campus in ways that work for our audiences. That includes being open to looking in the mirror with something like the Statement of Aspirational Practice and not being dismissive. Finally, if I and others in my office are collaborating and doing innovative things, it leads to…
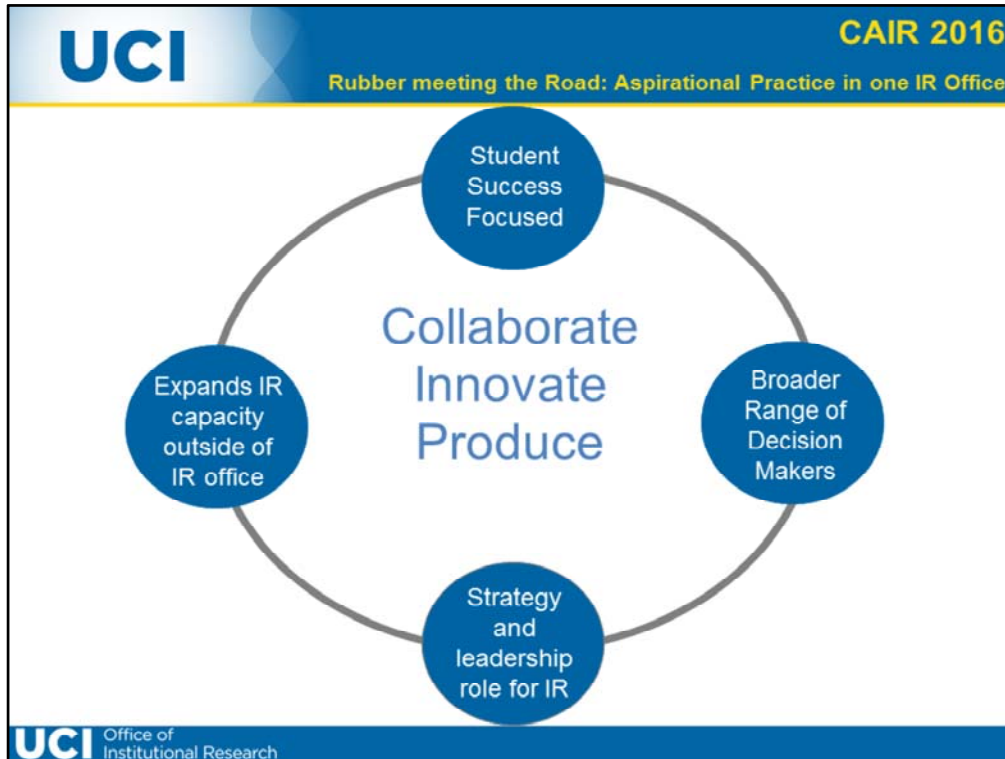
Producing. Being seen as a responsive and a productive office results in many other good things. I do not recall working with a campus decision-maker who did not want information sooner than later – getting things done in a timely manner informs the decisions being made at our campuses, and is appreciated and rewarded.

So how do these ideas in the Aspirational Statement help me and my office collaborate, innovate, and "get 'er done?" How does it make us more mindful about what we do, so we view institutional research as a career and not just a job, and help lead others to better decision making?

We will start our examination with one of the more challenging tasks that come our way… Josh will describe how our institutional research office approached our support of the campuses' strategic planning efforts.

UC Irvine went through a leadership change in 2014 that brought with it a burst of activity. This happens when a new university leader arrives and strives to balance the need to make overdue changes without wasting time.

UCI's new chancellor sought out an ambitious agenda to grow the university's research enterprise, continue expanding enrollment access to a larger number of students, and cement the financial sustainability within the stark reality of a postsecondary system that works on fewer resources with each passing year.
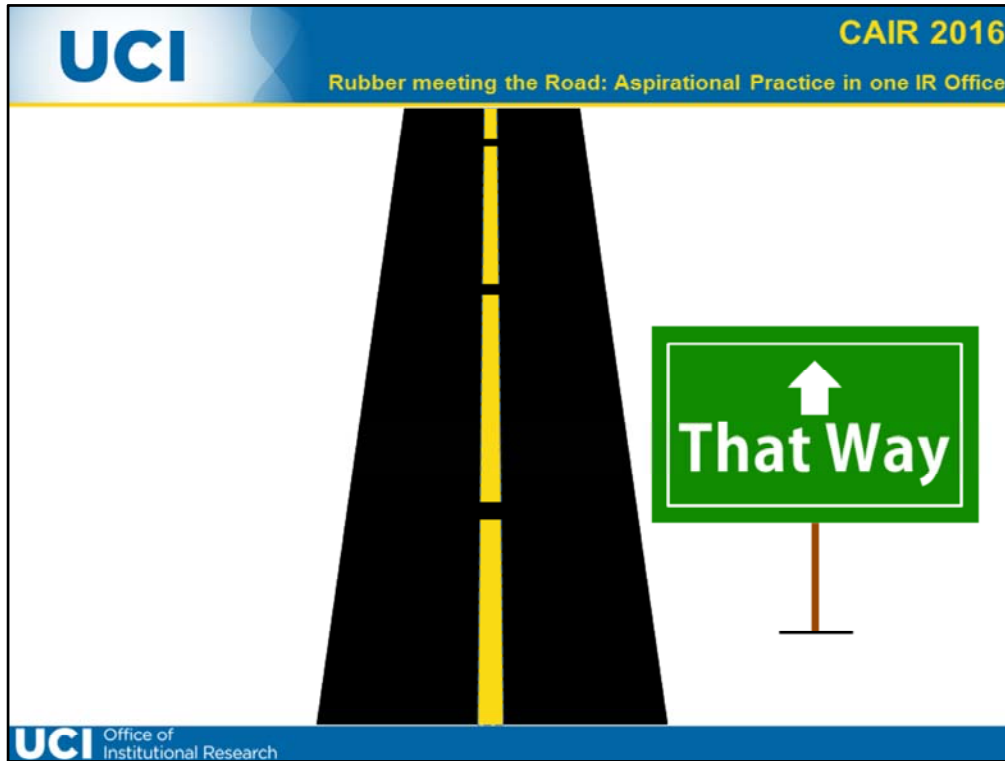
Academic planning asked our office to help them build empirical support for a strategic plan for the university, to help develop a roadmap and checkpoints for this growth.
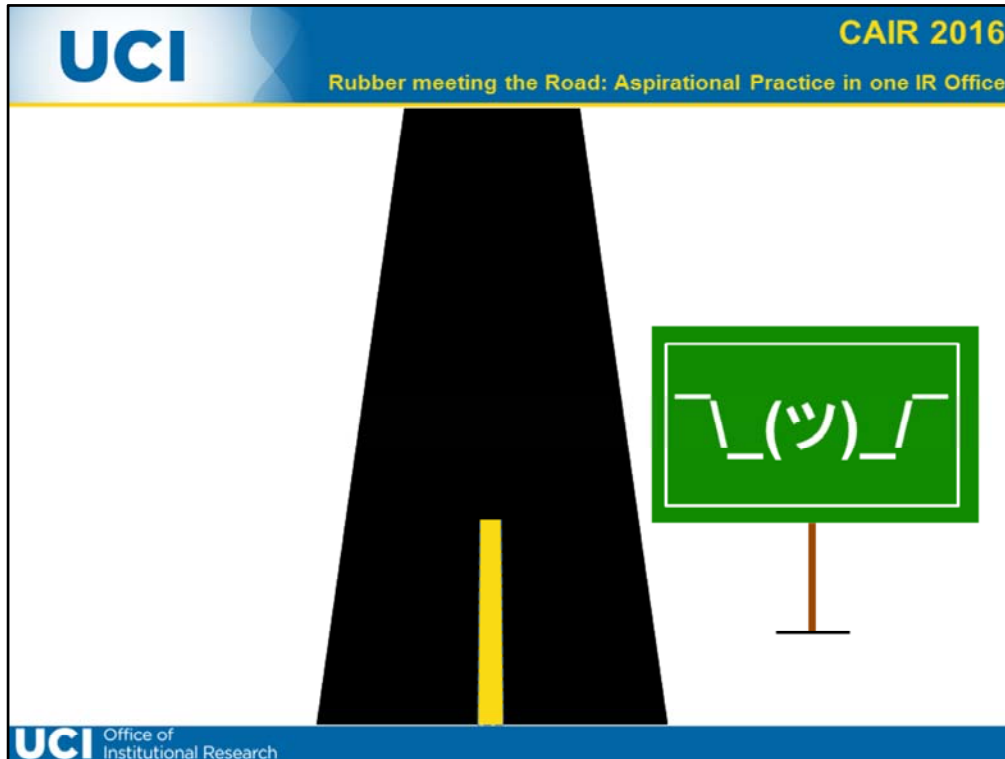
This is one of the more frightening things an institutional research office can do—conduct an open-ended exploration of your institution, to cut through ambiguity and say this is where we can be better.

"Strategic plan."

The phrase alone puts a lump in your throat.

This is the kind of project that makes us vulnerable to an endless search for meaning

The ideas that drive the aspirational practices mark the checklist of how we kept steady and made it safely back to shore.
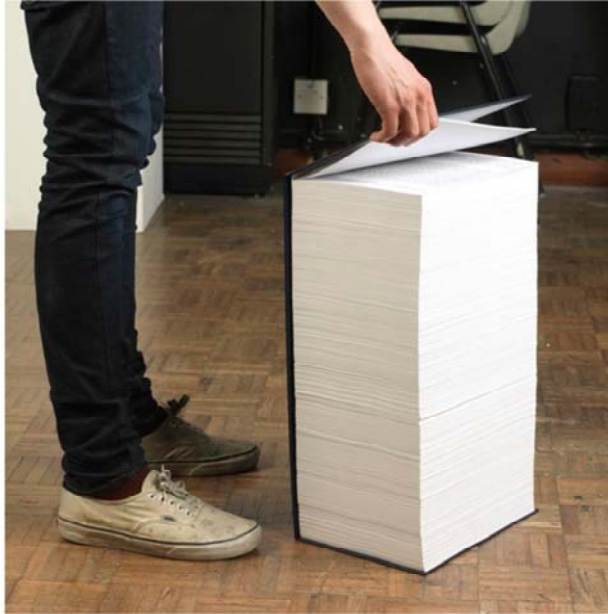
Normally this kind of task would result in one report that no one reads, so the anxiety for how to make this relevant could be moot.
But this time it's supposed to be different. This time, as a university, we want these ideas to resonate. Getting people invested is critical to fulfilling the promise and potential of the university to support new discoveries and provide opportunities to as many students as possible.
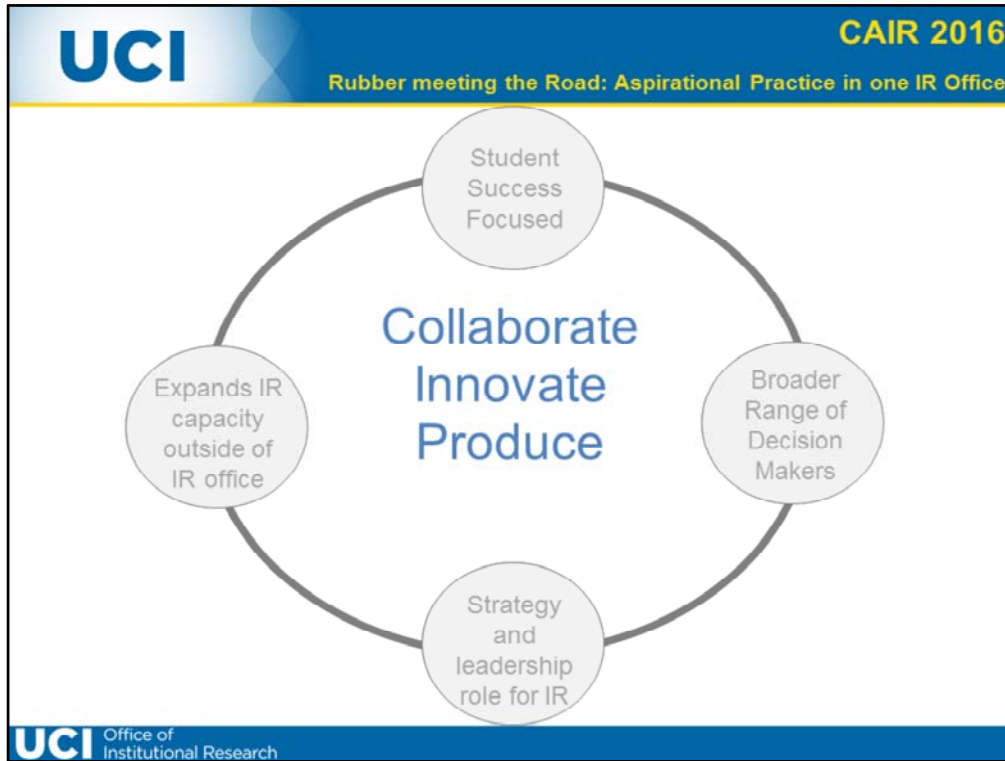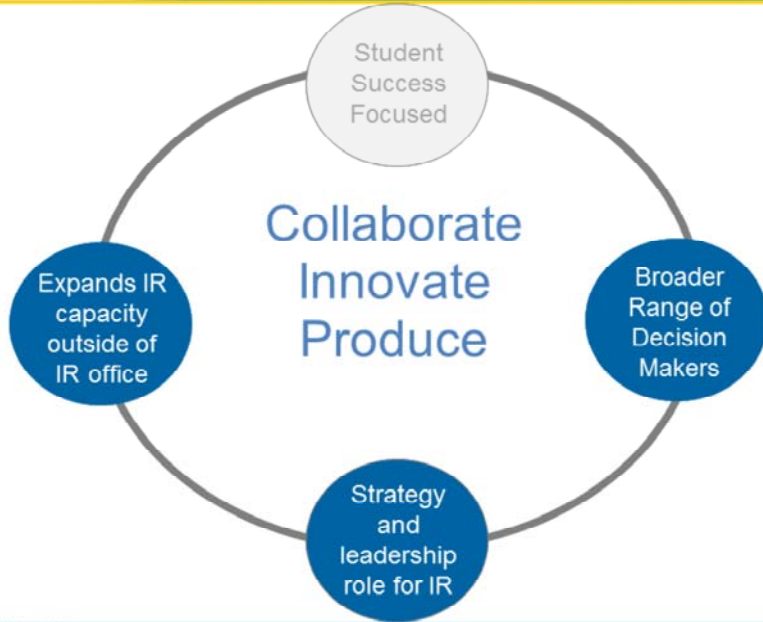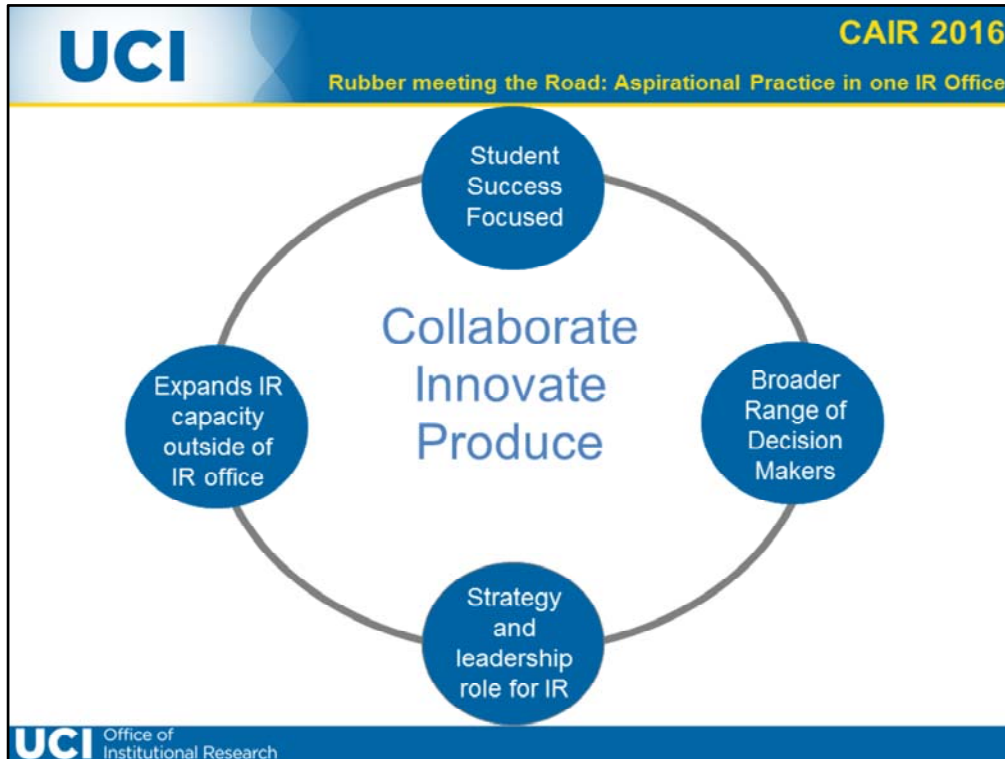
Drafting this plan dovetailed with the blueprint laid out by the statements of aspirational practice.

34
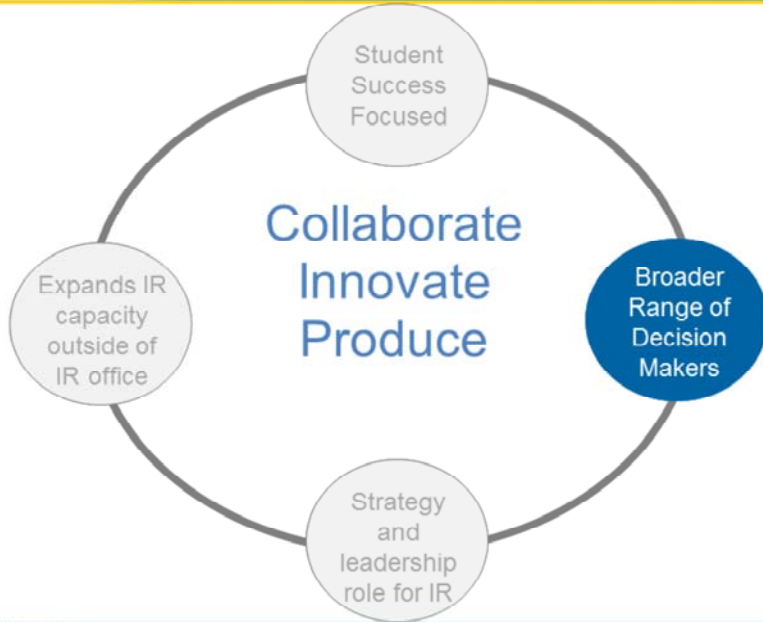
In getting data, the IR office expanded decision-makers, activated a new leadership structure, was shaped by student-centered ideals.

We gave ourselves an opportunity to reach out to others and collaborate, to tap into other's expertise. To think mindfully about the work that we do and generate useful data through innovative new strategies.

As we worked through the planning phases, we had to face the same kinds of questions that we know on a smaller scale.
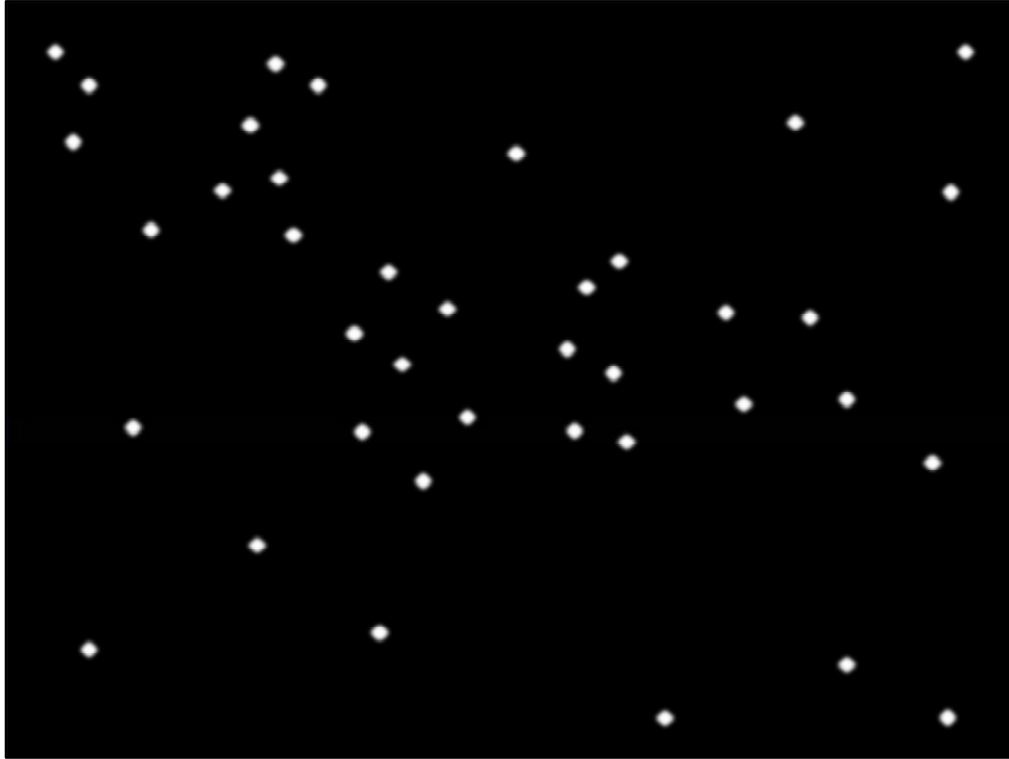
This is a job of figuring out what you want your university to look like for the next ten years and how that's going to position you for the ten after that.

We wanted to know several things about the university, what is its place in the universe. To bring individual data points, like our graduation rate, as a constellation with meaning.
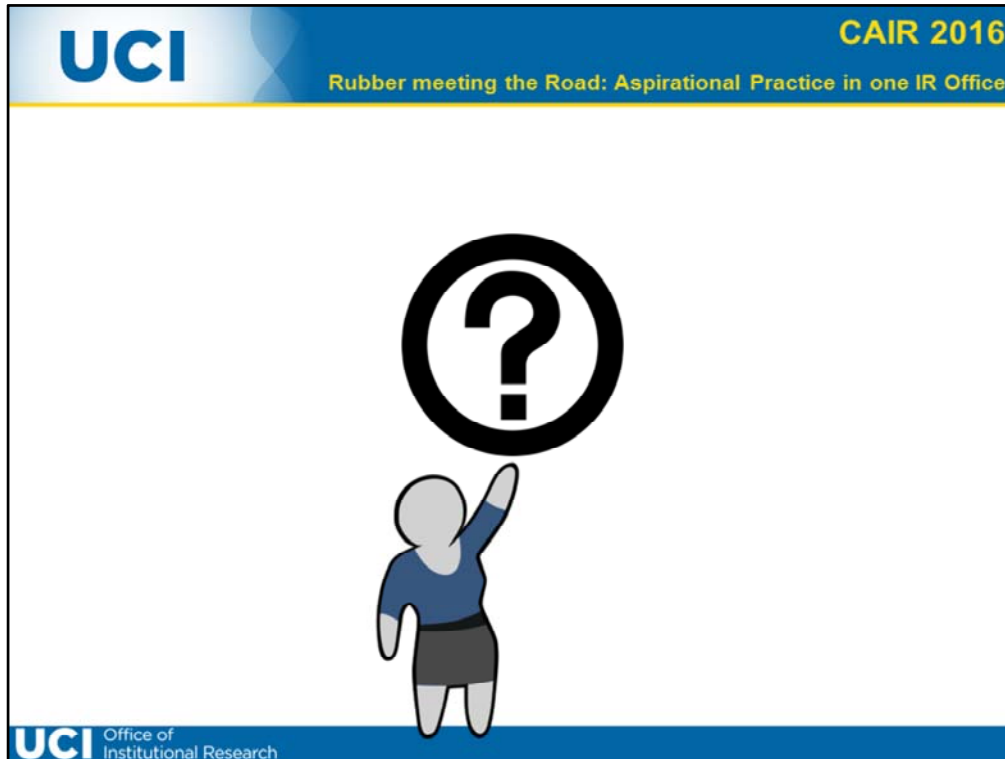
We had ideas for how we wanted to grow, but needed to know how it lined up with how faculty, students and staff already felt about the university.

We needed to build a case for the plan.

The questions write themselves.

What's your focus?

How do you decide what tool works best?

How do you go through all this data?

How do you get support for doing the work?

And finally, the question that's central to data analysts:

How to communicate so people care?

The ranked model approach would involve IR as just another check box. IR is there as data, personified. Leaders decide what to focus on, we do the analysis and represent the numbers.
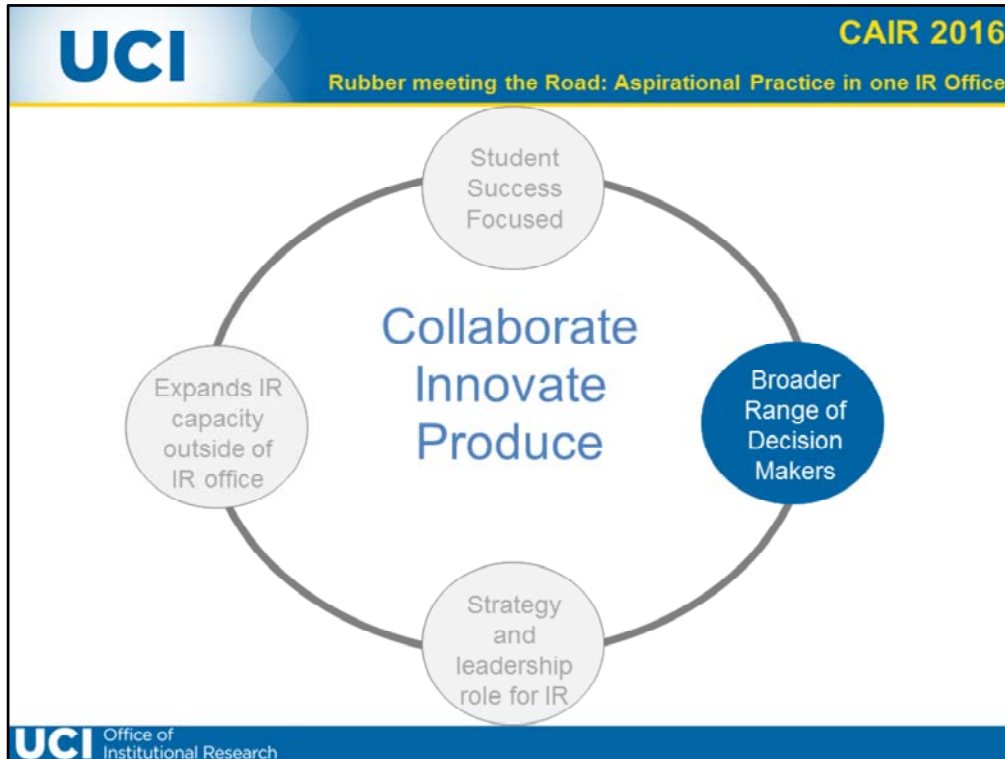
The aspirational practices for a new vision implores us to give units who normally submit data requests the power to be their own curators of data. To call on staff as decision-makers.

Under our normal tool kit, we'd use previous survey results, make a new close-ended survey, or pull numbers in the data warehouse.

Things that were already available, and the story it would tell would ring familiar, it may have re-contextualized the story of UCI—a young university with an increasingly productive and effective research program. But this would tell us where we are, not where we should go.

Our collaborators led the effort to test new methods to get the data for supporting their ideas. To give shape to the growth.

They opted for two designs.

One was an open-ended survey, which asked people to respond to ten questions and produced lots of text data. A second tool, a new wiki survey, built on the findings from the open-ended survey.

Our first pass left us with oceans of data, unstructured, ambiguous, and complex. Thousands of responses from staff, faculty, and students leaving just over 300,000 words to sift through.
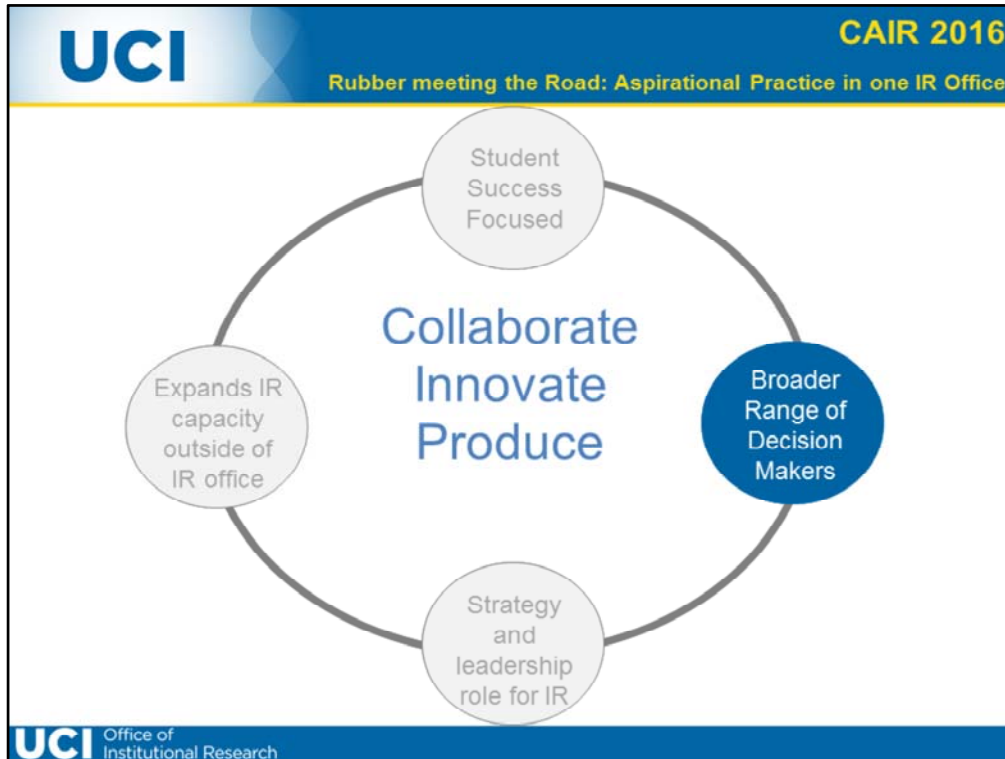
We analyzed the open-ended survey using more common and increasingly ubiquitous text-mining tools, like word clouds, where the most common words for each question are emphasized and sentiment analysis, where we figure out how these words are strung together.

Through this, we isolated the common themes that were running through the responses.
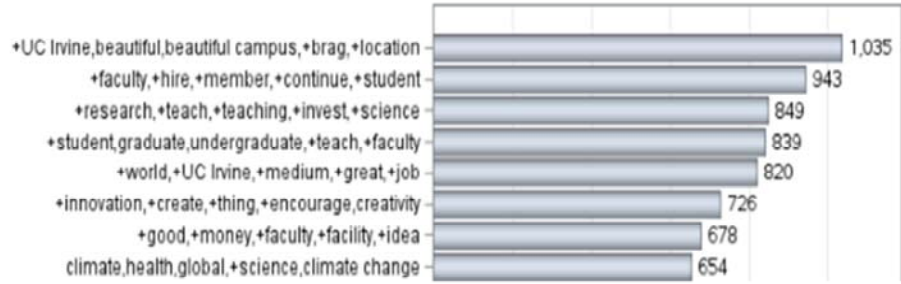
We turned to faculty to provide their expertise, to sift through the results and distill the findings into clear areas that would ID the places we would grow.

These responses were prioritized by their prominence and we put together a wiki survey, which took the sentiments from the text analysis and posed competing questions to people.

We figured out what people cared about and then asked them more pointed questions about those themes that reoccurred.

Do you think we should focus on constructing a new research building or expand faculty in the humanities and social sciences? This connected the campus more, asking people in the career center what the role of arts should be on campus and how important it is compared to something like expanding science research.
These ideas competed for air time and the ones with the most support rose to the top.
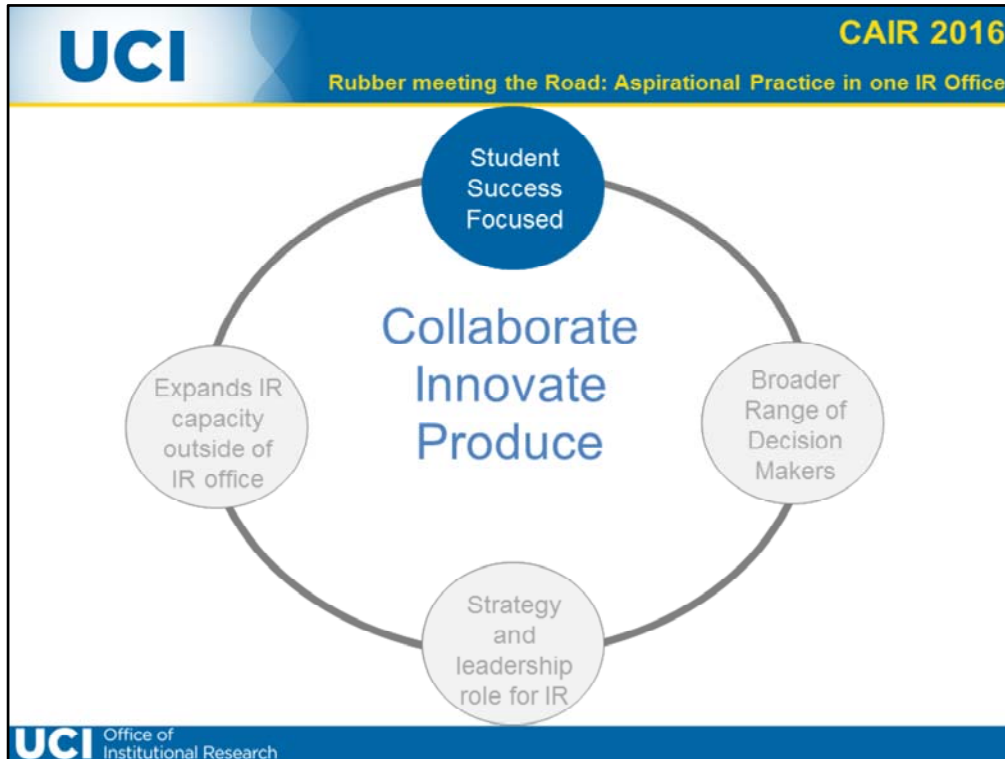
This analysis gave us support for developing a way to communicate the ideals of the strategic plan as it came together and organize the different areas of growth. And it wouldn't have happened without this collaboration.
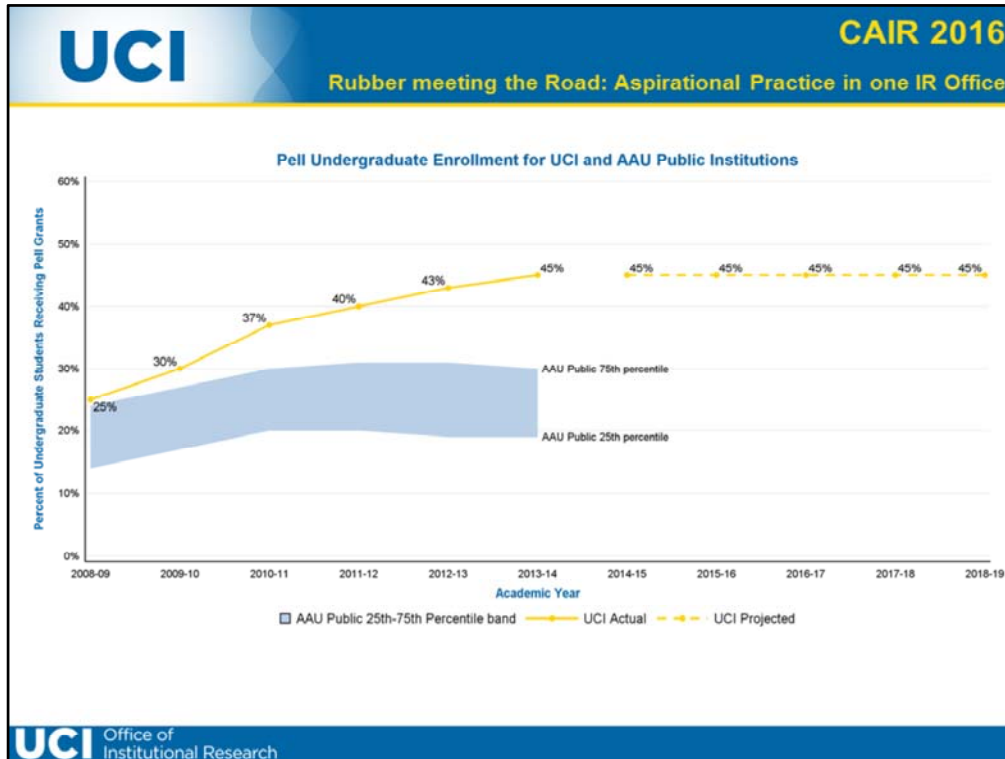
The story that the data told pointed us to selecting the most important benchmarks, benchmarks that were closer to the traditional areas of comparing institutions—financial aid, student credit hours, enrollment growth, and we compared ourselves against our past years and against our peers.

Nearly everything about the core values that were finding tied back to a student-centered culture.

We now had the backing to support some of the original things we wanted to grow: Our research program, the quality of our students, ties to the community, and financial sustainability.

These were the same kind of areas, but now we had specific things we could point to, that people can make a connection with and be invested in.

The type of data we tracked ranged from how many students were receiving Pell grants to total research dollars.
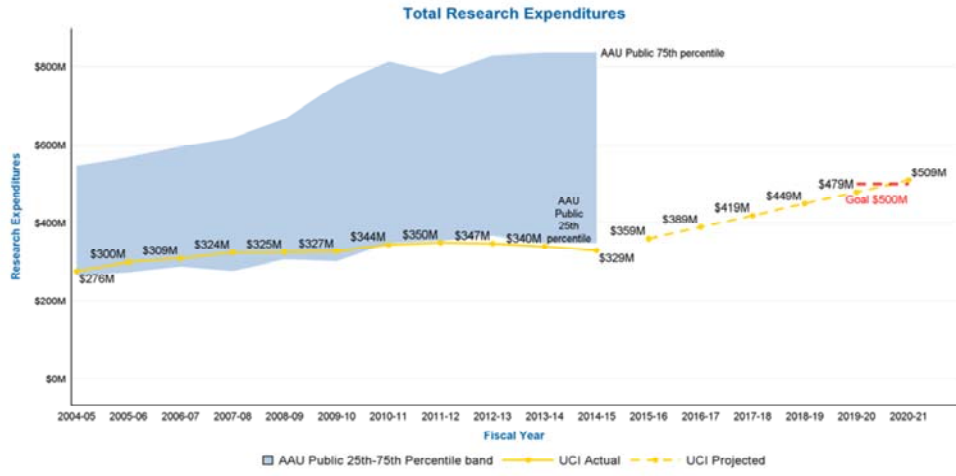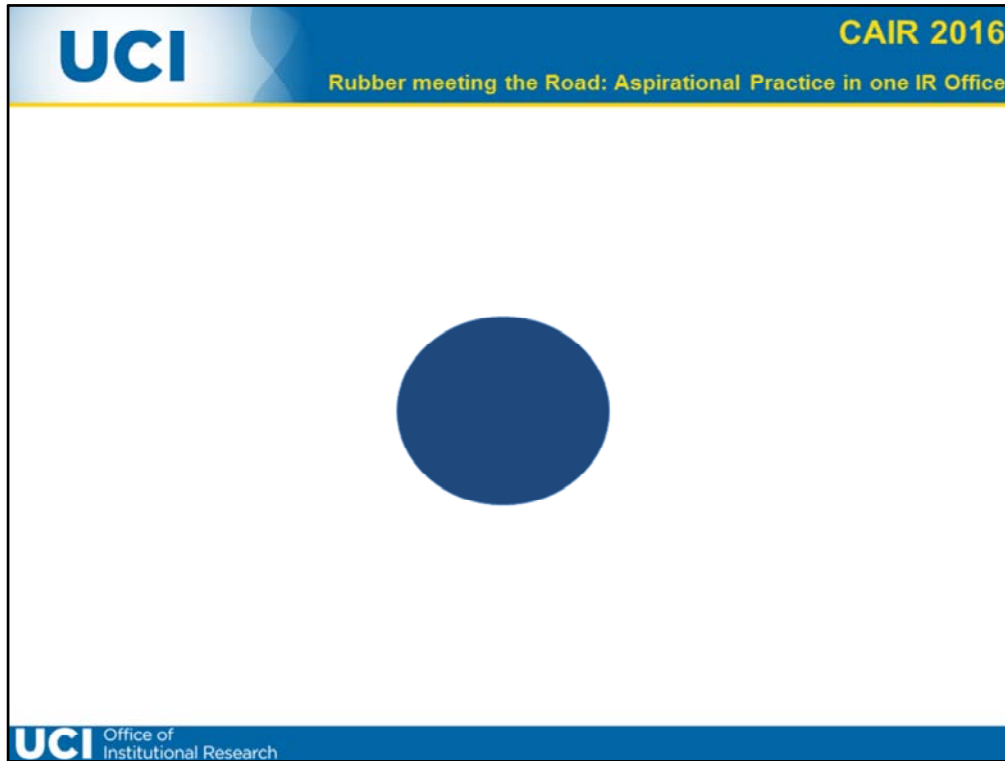
But we also tracked areas as varied as the attendance of theater and music performance to the number of certificates granted by continuing education programs, and this asked for data from all units.

they tapped into things they were already kind of tracking, but didn't realize how powerful their individual data point could be when used in a larger context

We currently maintain all these data elements from a number of campus departments into a monitoring system and publish the benchmarks for our growth.

The benchmark site is public, so we revealed the big plan, but what was most important, was realizing that a huge part of the audience was the university staff and stakeholders themselves. This was who we had to convince to care, because the strategic plan was as much for them, as for anyone visiting our website.

We were able to showcase that their work had purpose and meaning, but we needed to maintain this in the consciousness of people, put it front and center and regularly communicate with those who would be clients as proper stewards of their own data.
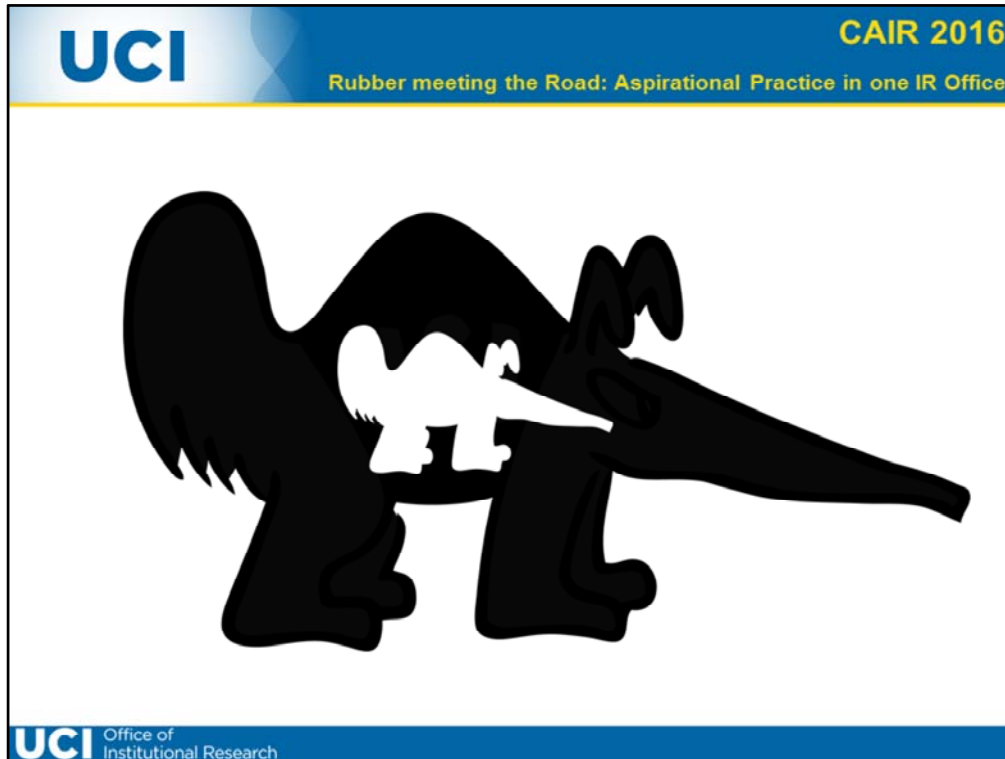
They have responsibility over their own data as something that is going to be useful to people outside their own departments. This empowered individual units to track their own numbers and understand how their growth is pegged to the university's. This is large scale planning, built collaboratively, with a totality of university support and empowered by leadership.
What we think about next is what is generalizable from this in the day-to-day practices?
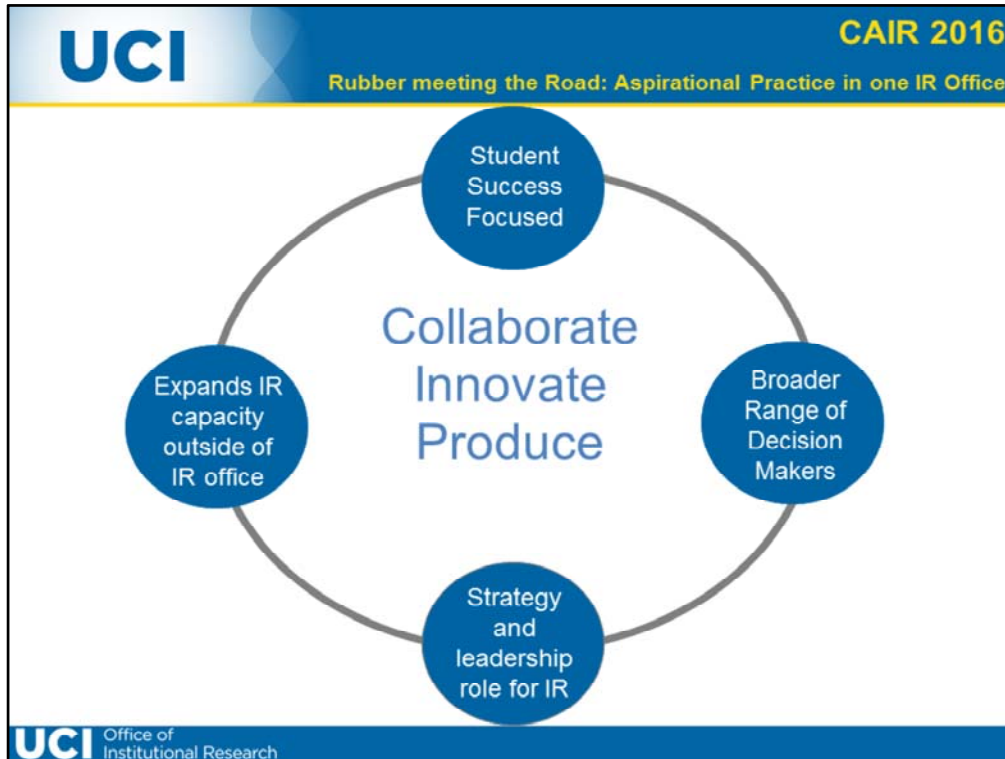
How do we apply these lessons in ways that make sense for the daily data needs of the university? How do you continue to bring people in to where decisions are made and keep our collaborative networks active? What do we do to continue innovating and keep up the pace of the work?
Ryan shares his experiences on fostering these connections.

CAIR 2016

Rubber meeting the Road: Aspirational Practice in one IR Office

Building Connections on Campus

Ryan Hoadwonic

UCI Office of Institutional Research
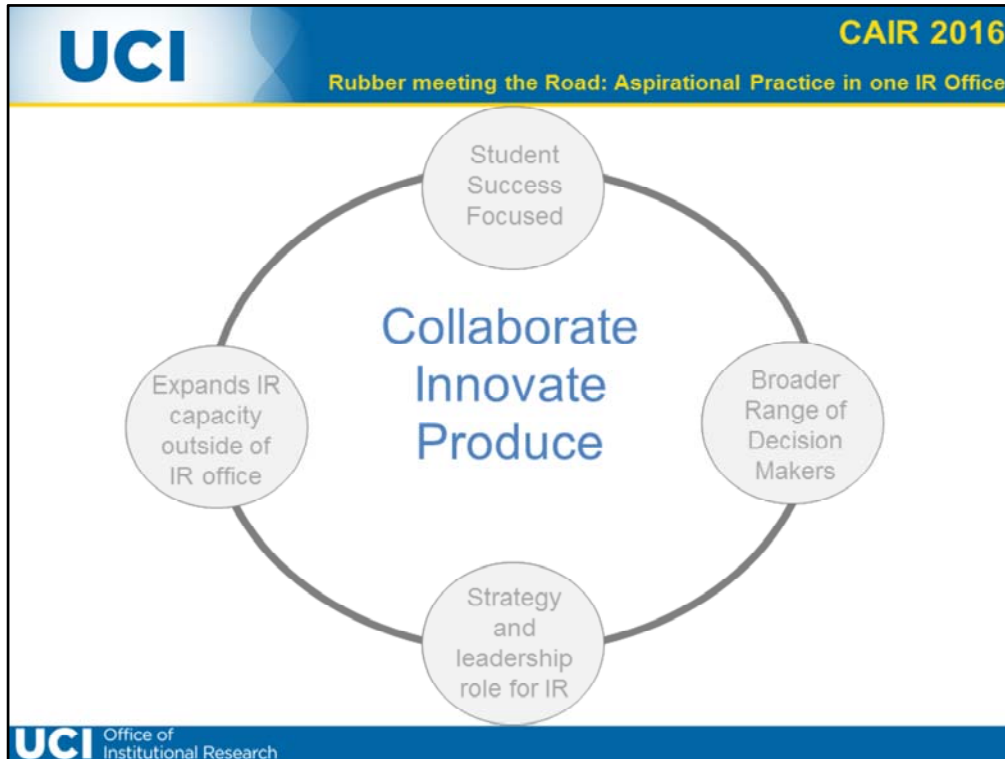
In the federated model, it is important to build connections and collaborations with units on campus. This is one way to help empower people so we can activate a broad network of institutional research…
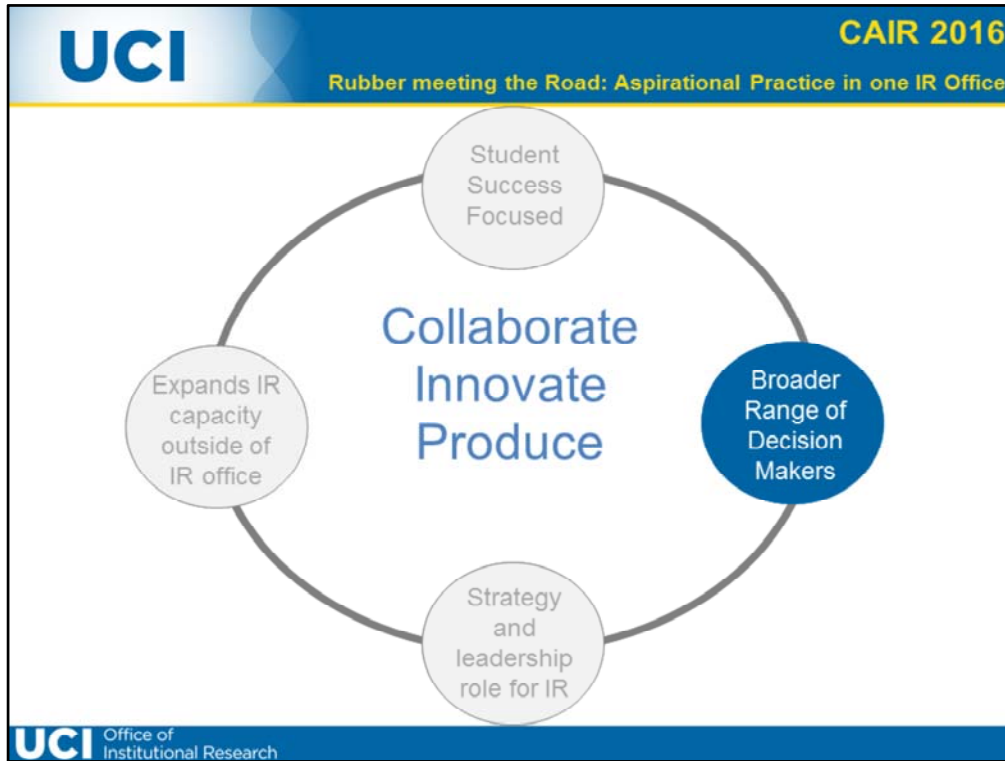
to include a broader range of decision makers…
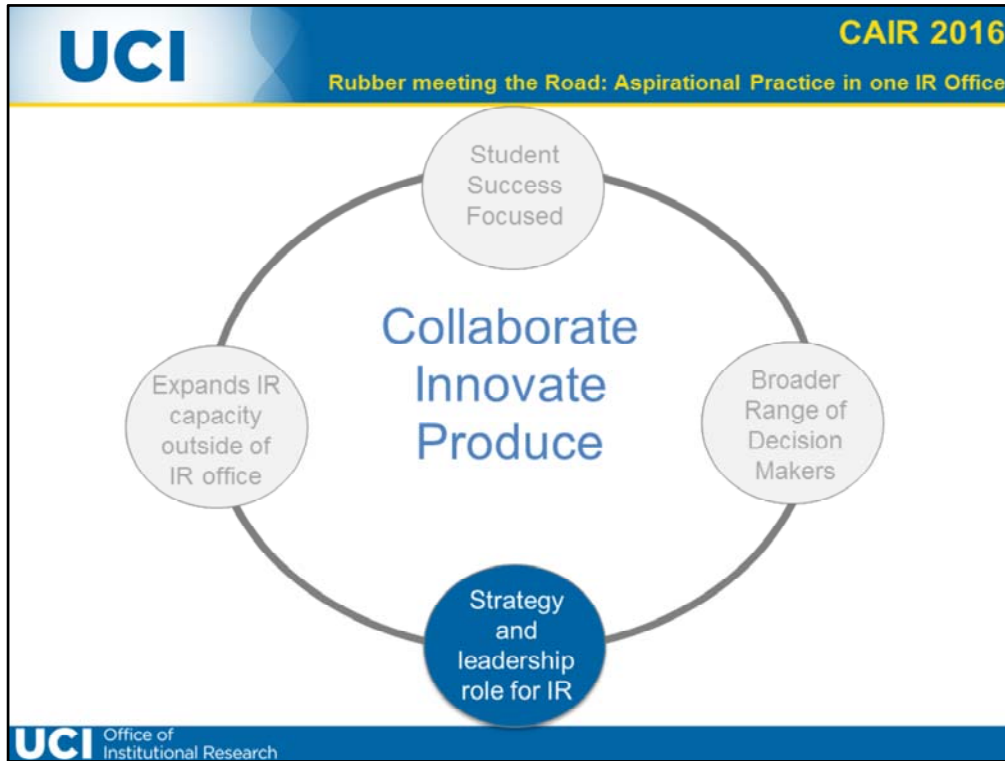
to focus on strategy and leadership for IR…
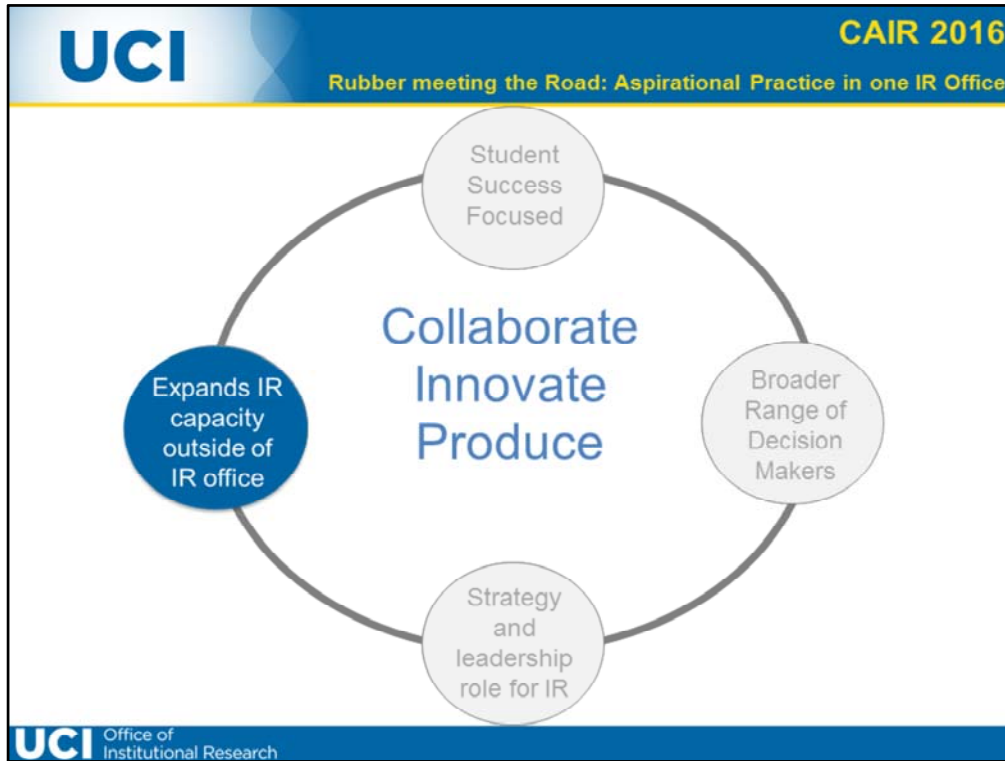
to expand the IR capacity outside of central IR office…
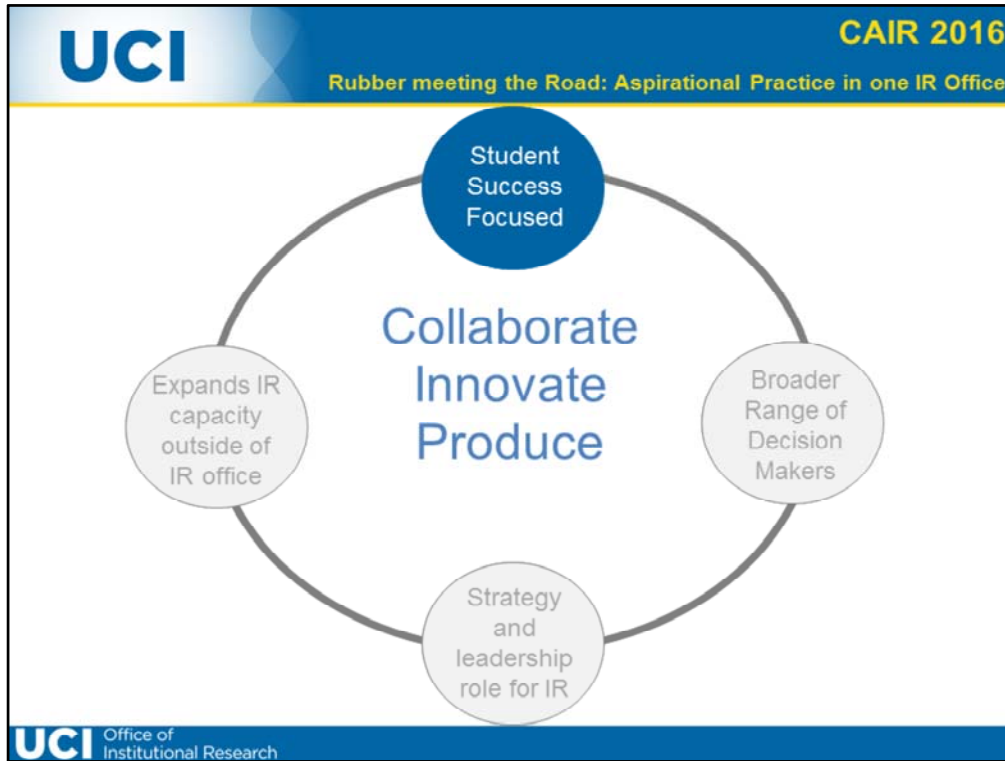
and to remain student success focused.

Getting a seat at the table, so to speak, helps to support the actualization of aspirational practice, at least on our campus.

Without such a seat, people may not be aware of institutional research and may not be empowered to make decisions based on data. I have seen how collaboration and innovation has been utilized to get the right people asking the right questions and using the right tools to make decisions.
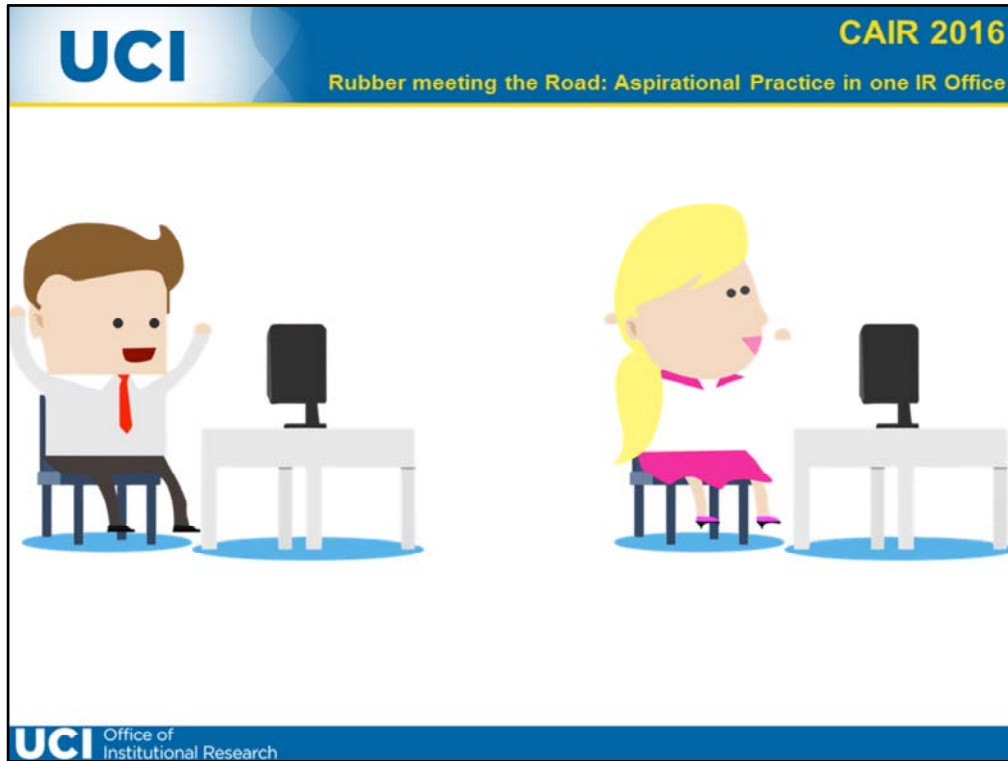
I am a member of the Chancellor's Advisory Committee that is tasked with advising leadership on issues faced by staff.

Why institutional research would be on such a group, you may ask…or, at least, I asked that question. I spent about a year trying to figure out my place and purpose on the committee.
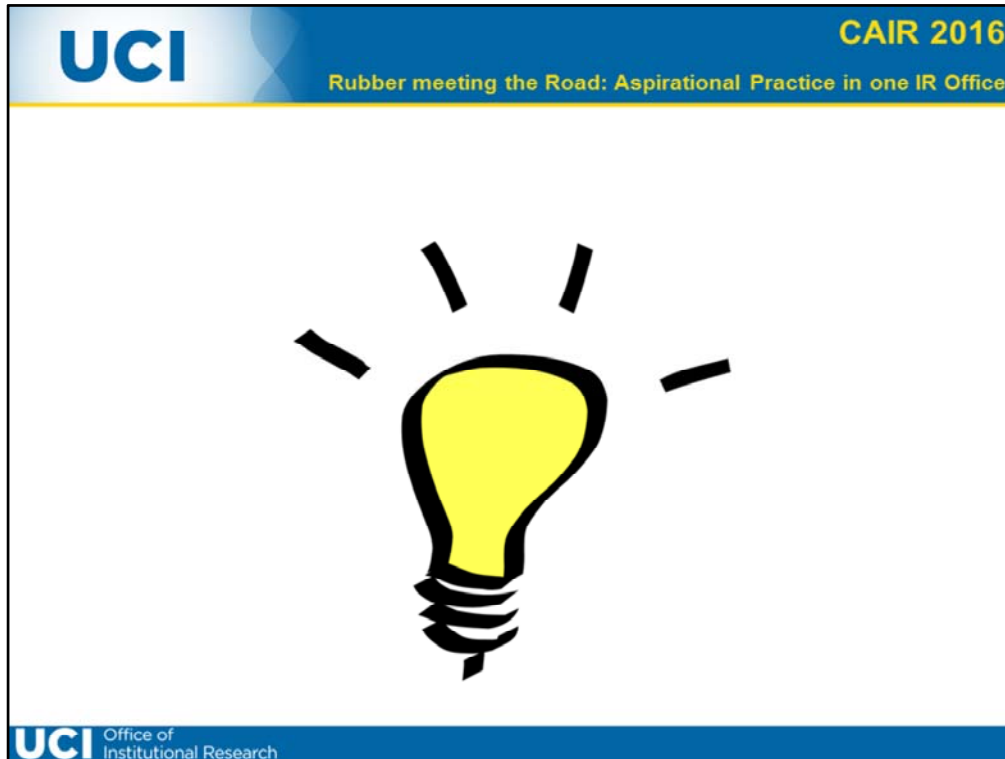
Then I realized I was put there to guide the discussion to be data focused; prior to me being on the committee, there was no "data person"…so there were a lot of anecdotal stories about low staff morale or poor compensation or high turnover…but nothing concrete.

I though "what if we look at the data? Let's see what we can find about staff turnover or promotion rates."
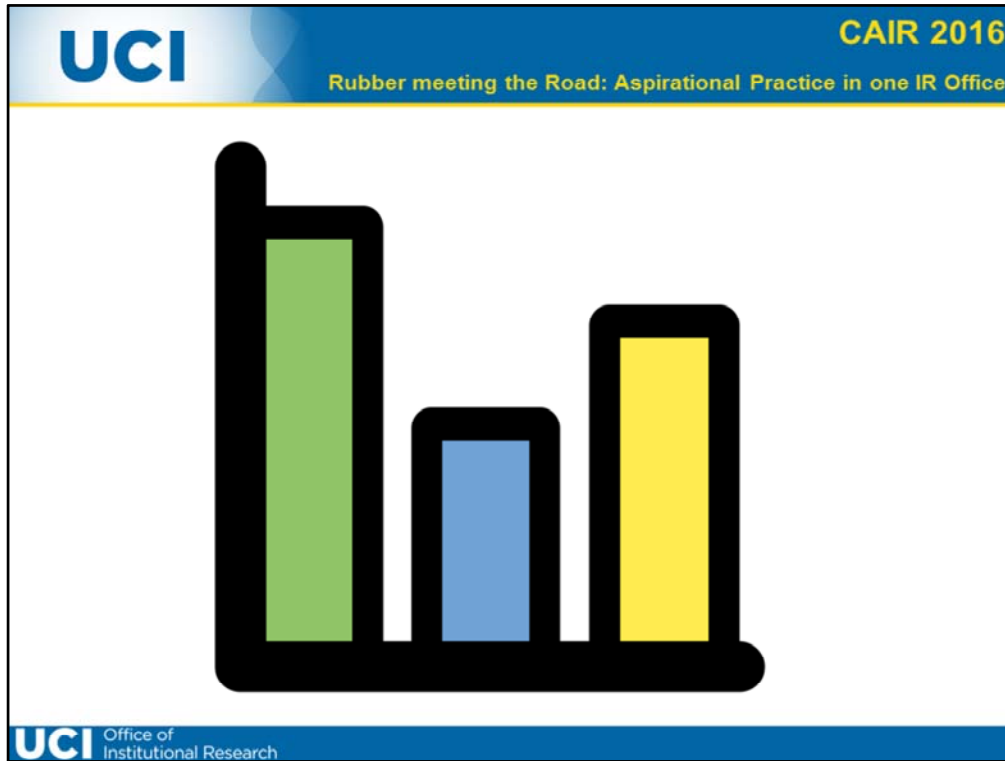
This got the ball rolling. We soon participated in a data exchange on HR metrics that allowed us to compare ourselves along some measures with universities with a similar research profile. This pushed the envelope even further. Now we had comparative data to see how UCI "stacked up."

What we found was surprising. UCI had a very low promotion rate and a pretty high turnover rate compared to other universities. This sent a clear message to the newly appointment head of HR…we have to focus on staff. After all, staff have the "frontline responsibility for fostering student development of academic and civic behaviors, supporting student learning outcomes, and creating collegiate spaces."

They are therapists…
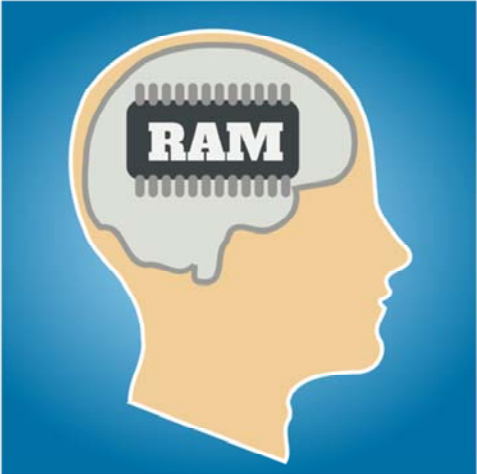
Advisors…
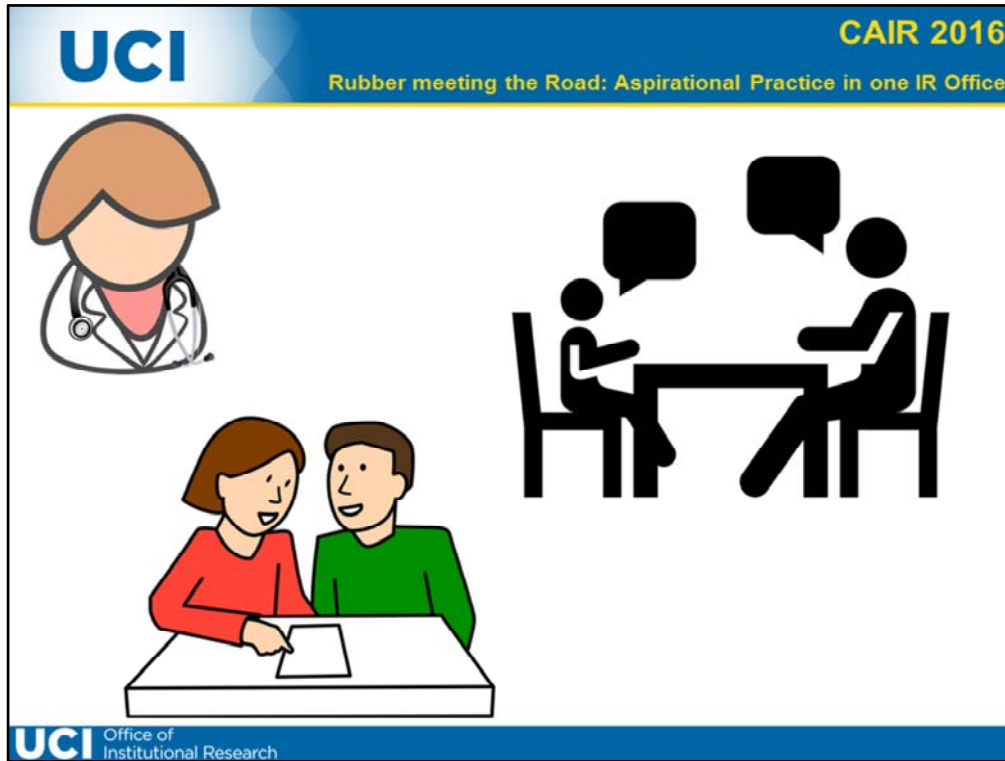
Coordinators. They are often the first person a student interacts with. Keeping this group happy and motivated has a trickledown effect – it also means they are better able to serve both students and faculty.

It also means that we maintain institutional knowledge as fewer people leave…

and we save money and resources not having to train and retrain new people.
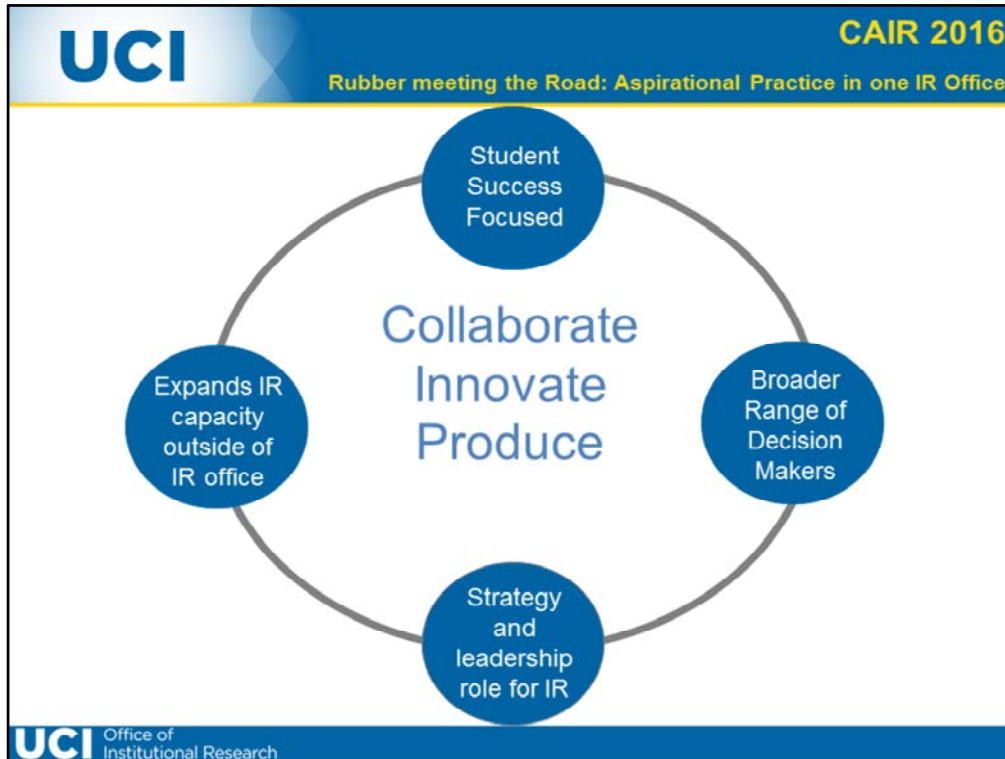
Some changes that came as a result of this new focus included clearer promotion pathways, changes to incentive structures, and stronger institutional commitment to professional development.

Being on this committee also meant that people who could make decisions were starting to see data and ask questions. It allowed for IR to collaborate with units on campus that it may not otherwise have, such as Human Resources. It has allowed innovation in data, tools, and dissemination methods that meet the institution's needs.
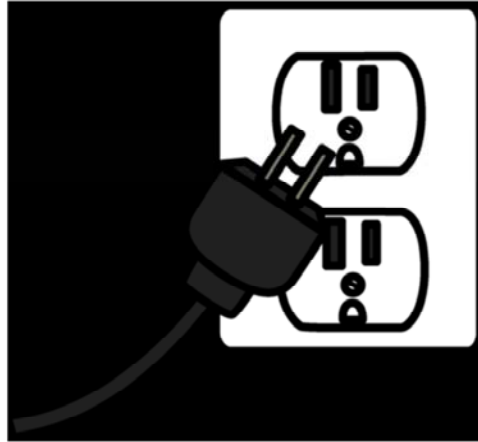
Keeping an open mind about what institutional research is and where it should be used allowed us to plug into and activate a networked institutional research function on campus.
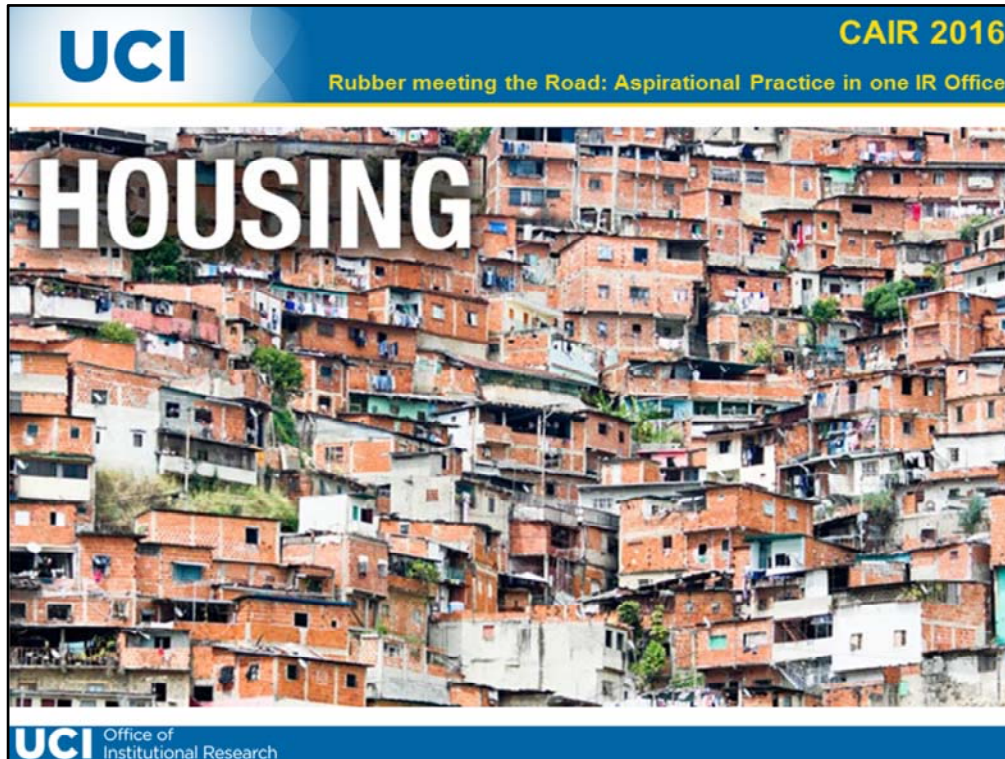
Another example of an important collaboration is that with Housing. Housing came to IR with a question - "what story do the data tell about the students who use housing?" It's a pretty simple question, but one that hasn't been asked before. After all, service units don't always have a lot of time to be self-reflective.
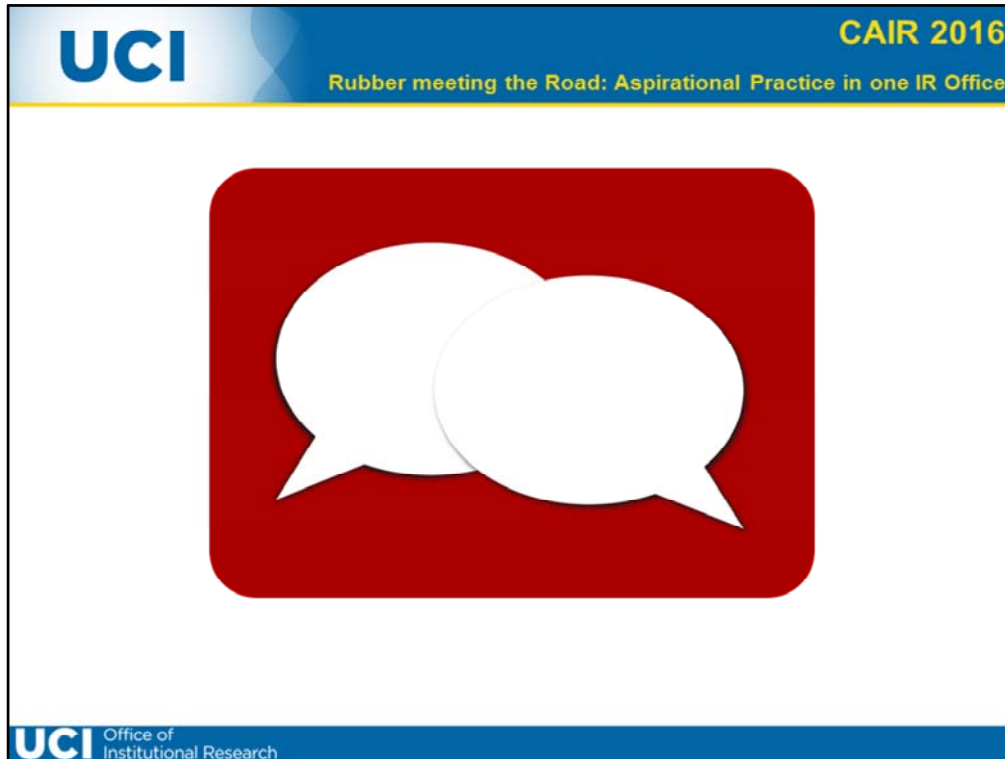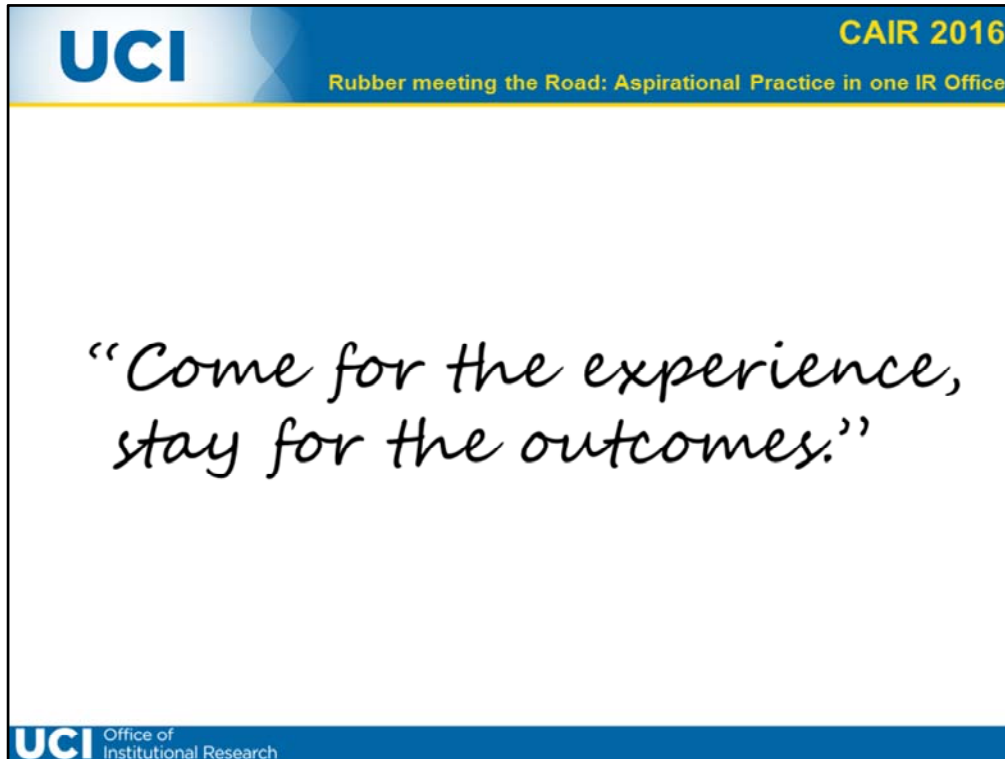
. However, because of our work with the unit in the past, we were able to help them ask that question....and it was through sitting down with them and showing them what we have and having conversations about what they want that we were able to really find the story.
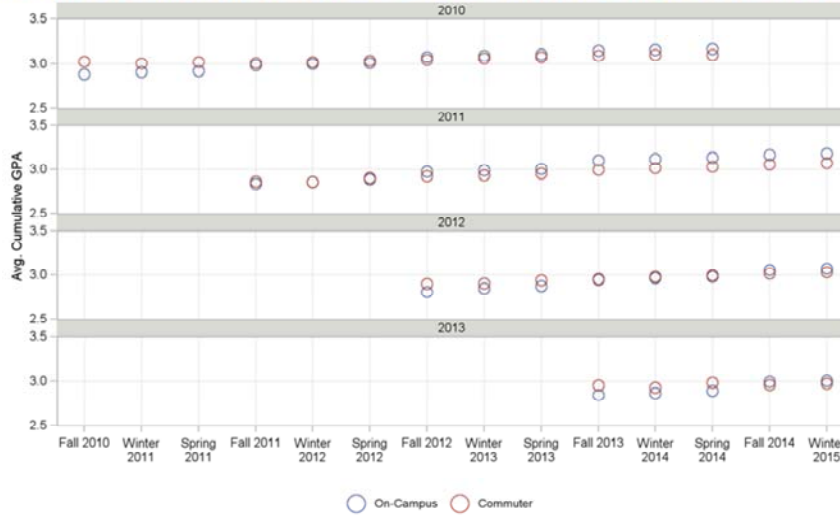
What we found was pretty interesting. As it turns out, students who start on campus actually have a lower GPA and took fewer units their first few terms than students who live off campus. Housing believed this was due to students adjusting to college life and living on their own for the first time. However, we also saw that the longer they stay on campus, the more their GPAs improved...and, as an example from the Fall 2010 cohort, the average GPA at graduation of those who stayed on campus their whole career was almost a tenth of a point higher than those who didn't.

Because of these findings, housing came up with the tagline "Come for the experience, stay for the outcomes."
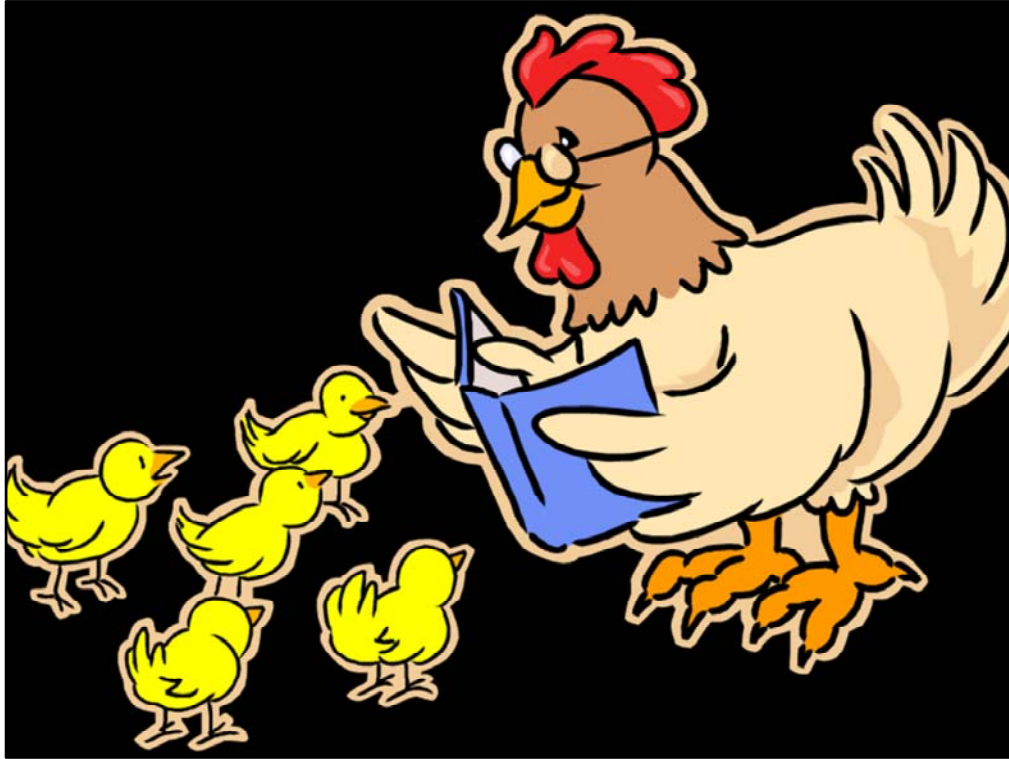
Interested in spreading this info, we were asked to present it to University of California System housing directors with the message "what story is your data telling you?" That story can help you make decisions; it can help raise additional questions; it can highlight areas of success and areas of possibility. But we have to find the story, and we have to find it at the right time and tell it to the right people.
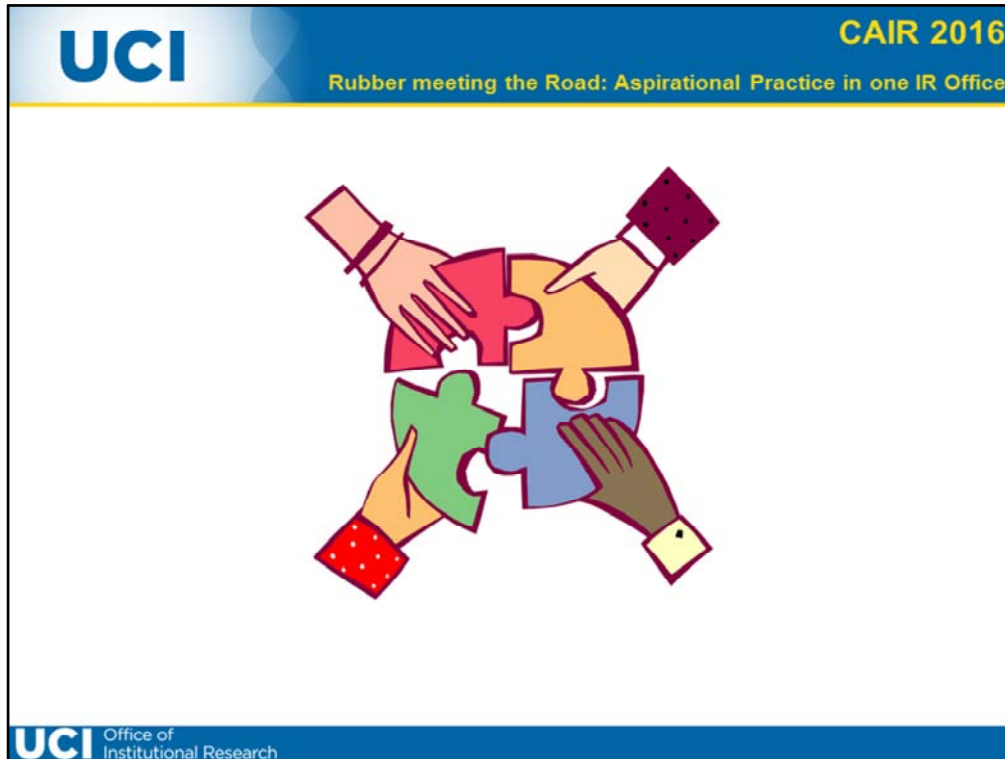
This one exploration of the data had fair reaching effects - it helped both our own local campus as well as other universities think about data and their students differently. It also prompted our campus to look into why there may be differing outcomes for different communities. After all, we can't think about units in vacuums. What happens in housing may have an effect on the student's overall success at UCI and vice versa; when we are dealing with people, and keeping a student focused perspective, we must remember that each touch point is important as they carry those experiences and thoughts with them as they move from unit to unit, as they navigate the web of their higher education career. Every unit on campus functions as part of a larger whole and we all have the same common goal and mission - and collaboration and innovation when it comes to looking for the stories in the data can help everyone involved.
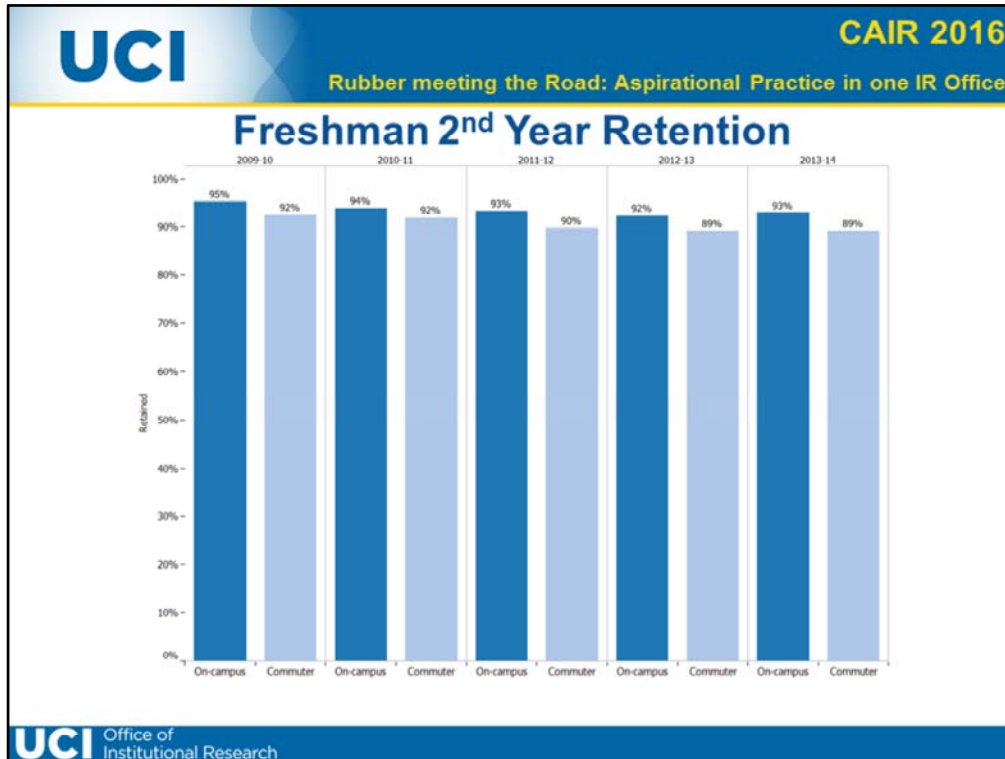
Further, from this collaboration, housing began to use and consume data; they purchased licenses to statistical analysis software and regularly met with IR to get data and to make sure they understood it. Housing began to use Tableau, for example, to access and create visual displays of data that helped them to see and tell their own stories.

This sort of collaboration has been happening more and more on campus. As IR works with and empowers units, they become more self-aware and data literate. Units anywhere from the Career Center, the Division of Undergraduate Education, Graduate Division, and Student Affairs have begun pushing for analysts in their office to be data experts and have used IR to help train, provide guidance on the use of tools, make informed decisions, serve students better, and generally be more effective and efficient. Even offices like Inclusive Excellence is connecting with IR to measure equity and diversity on campus and the Center for Educational Partnerships is utilizing IR more to ensure access and social mobility for students.
This sort of collaboration has been happening more and more on campus. As IR works with and empowers units, they become more self-aware and data literate. Units anywhere from the Career Center, the Division of Undergraduate Education, Graduate Division, and Student Affairs have begun pushing for analysts in their office to be data experts and have used IR to help train, provide guidance on the use of tools, make informed decisions, serve students better, and generally be more effective and efficient. Even offices like Inclusive Excellence is connecting with IR to measure equity and diversity on campus and the Center for Educational Partnerships is utilizing IR more to ensure access and social mobility for students.
These sorts of alliances hugely important in the changing landscape of Higher Education, at least in the public sector, where state funds seem to be drying up and people have to do more with less. Even some schools on our campus are jumping

on board. For example, our office worked with the School of Biological Sciences to help them hire their own Research Analyst, who would be able to serve the school the way the central office serves the university. I'll let him tell you about his experiences in that role.
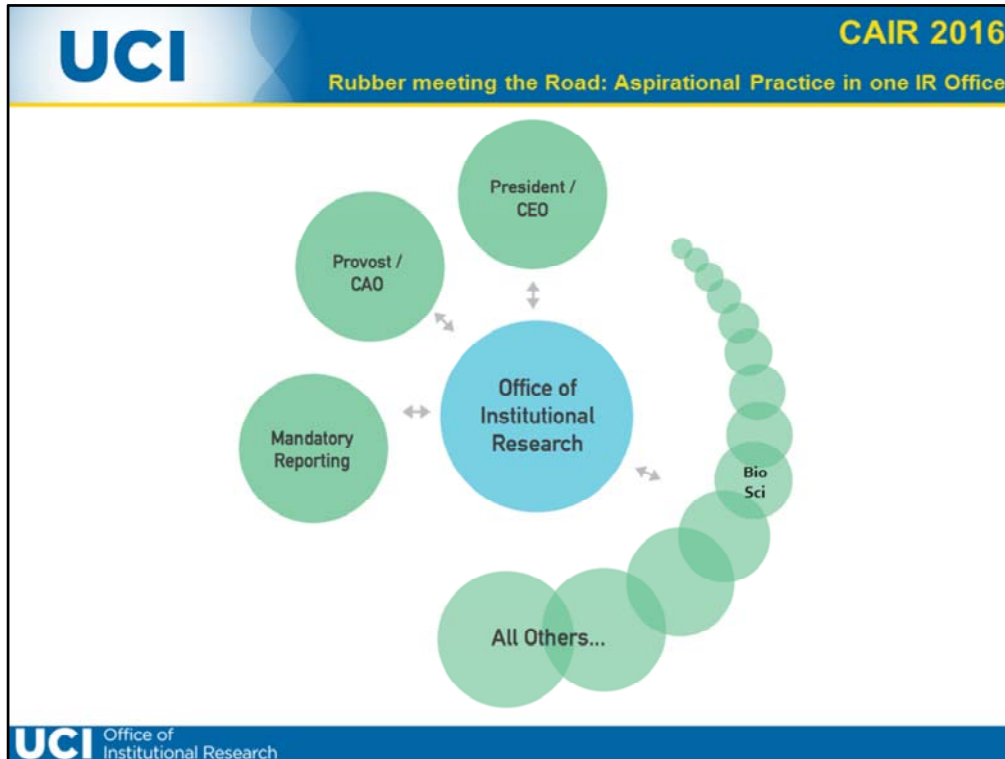
- Before coming into the world of IR, my understanding was that most offices were structured like this…
    - They were centralized and senior leadership, like the chancellor or provost, had top priority
    - And all other units would come second

- But as soon as I came on, I realized that my understanding, this understanding, of IR was quickly becoming outdated
- And really, it was this ranked model that our campus was working to change…

- I'm a satellite IR analyst for UCI's School of Biological Sciences
- Today, 5 months and 17 days into this position, I still ask myself "big picture" questions:
    - Why was my position created?
    - How do I help leadership make strategic decisions about the future of the School? and
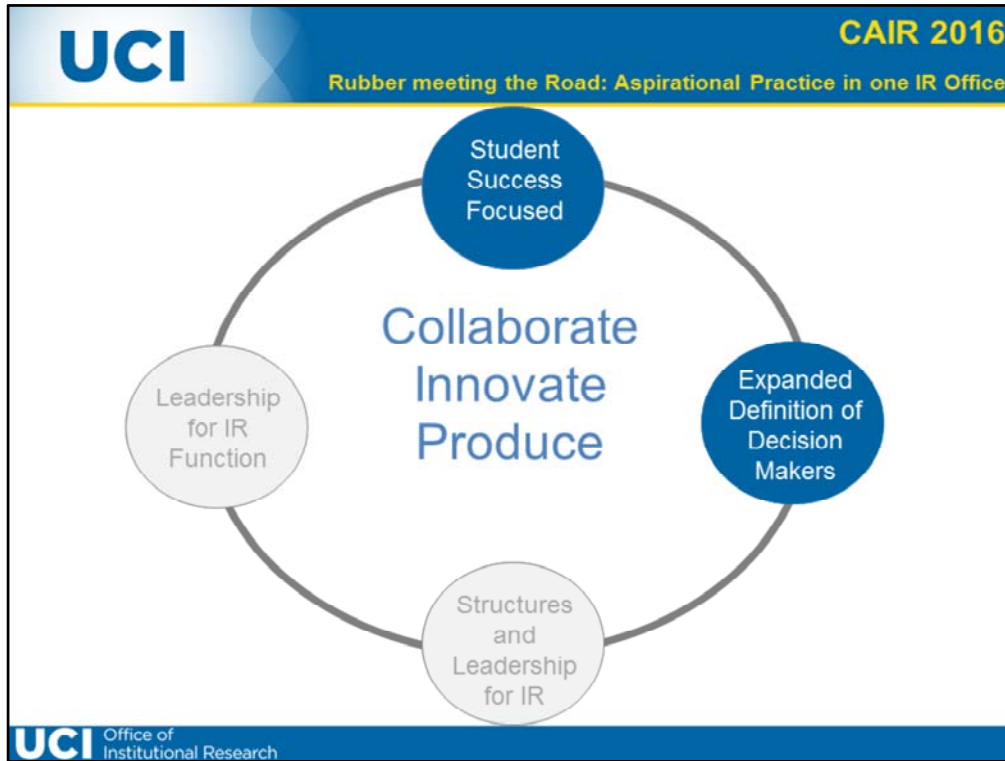   - How do I tie into the bigger scheme of things within the University?
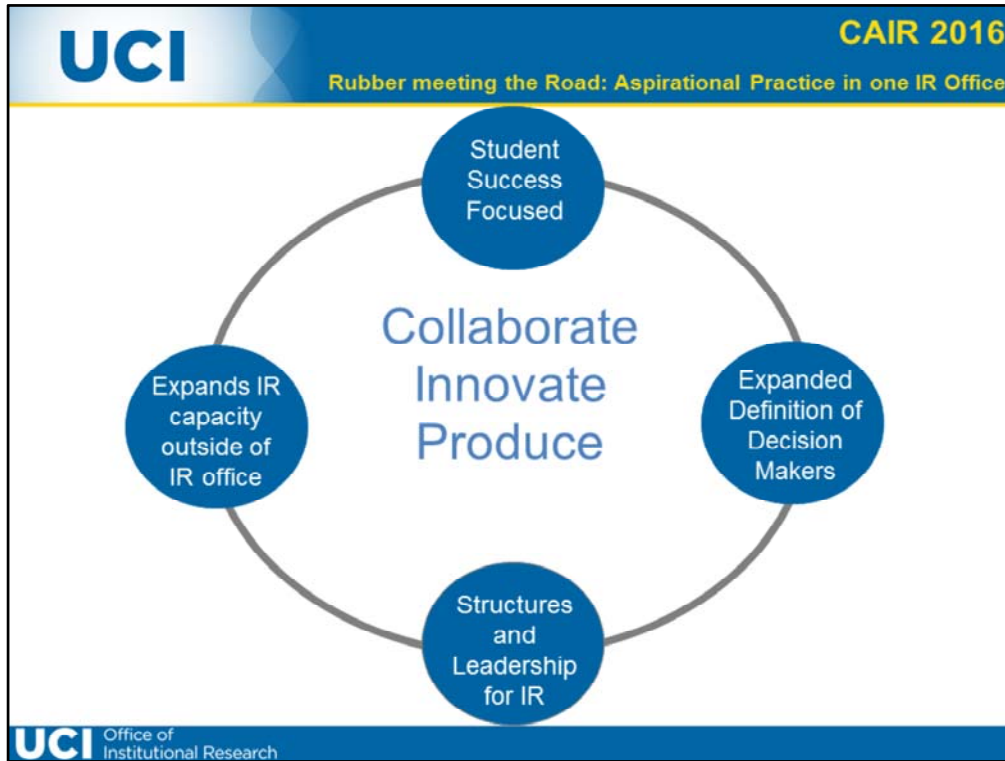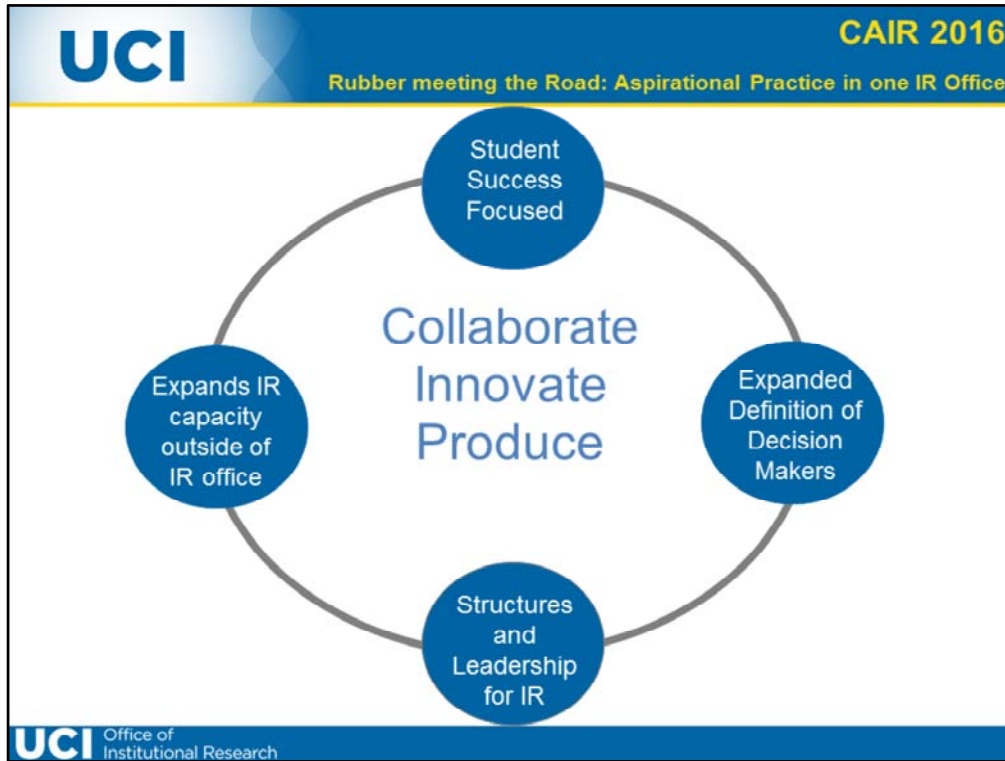
- As a newcomer to IR, AIR's Statement of Aspirational Practices has played a huge role in giving me structure and a mindset for my work.
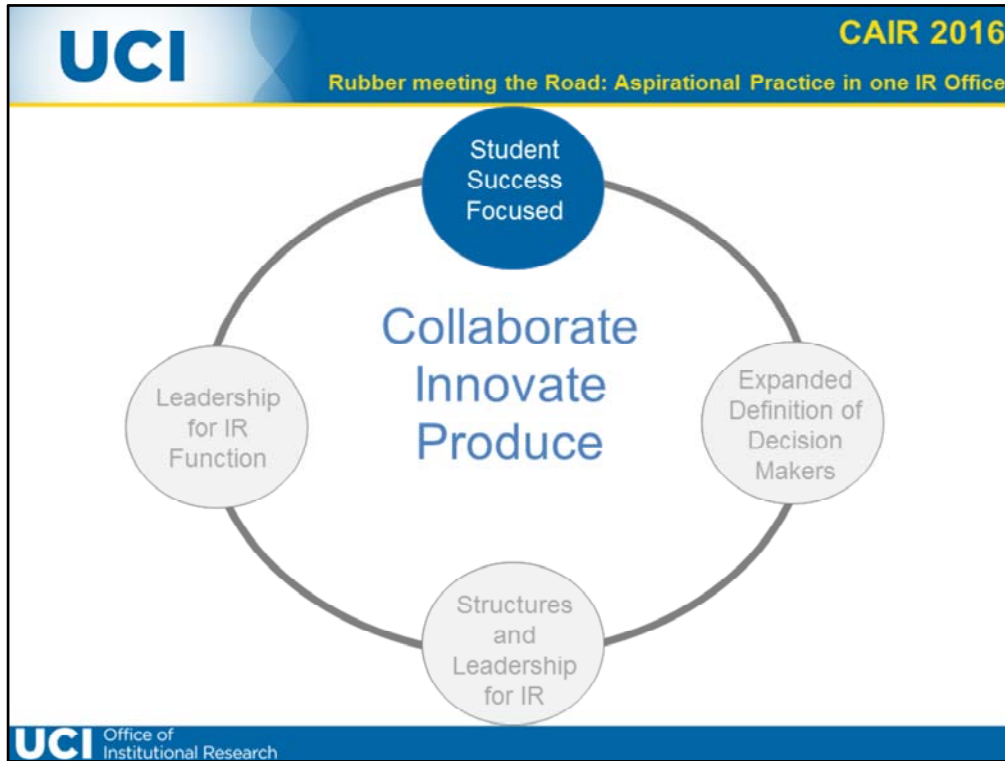
- It reminds me that student success is the focus

- …that staff, faculty, and even students drive a lot of changes on campus

- And being open minded about how we think about the structure of IR

- But, what exactly happens at the unit or school level where I'm at?

- Similar to what happened in Housing…
    - Our School wanted to leverage existing data to better manage our resources and this is really where I come in.

- ------------------------------
    - Our School wanted to be more mindful of how we managed our resources in times of li
    - one way of doing that was taking me on as a satellite IR analyst.

Ayala School of Biological Sciences
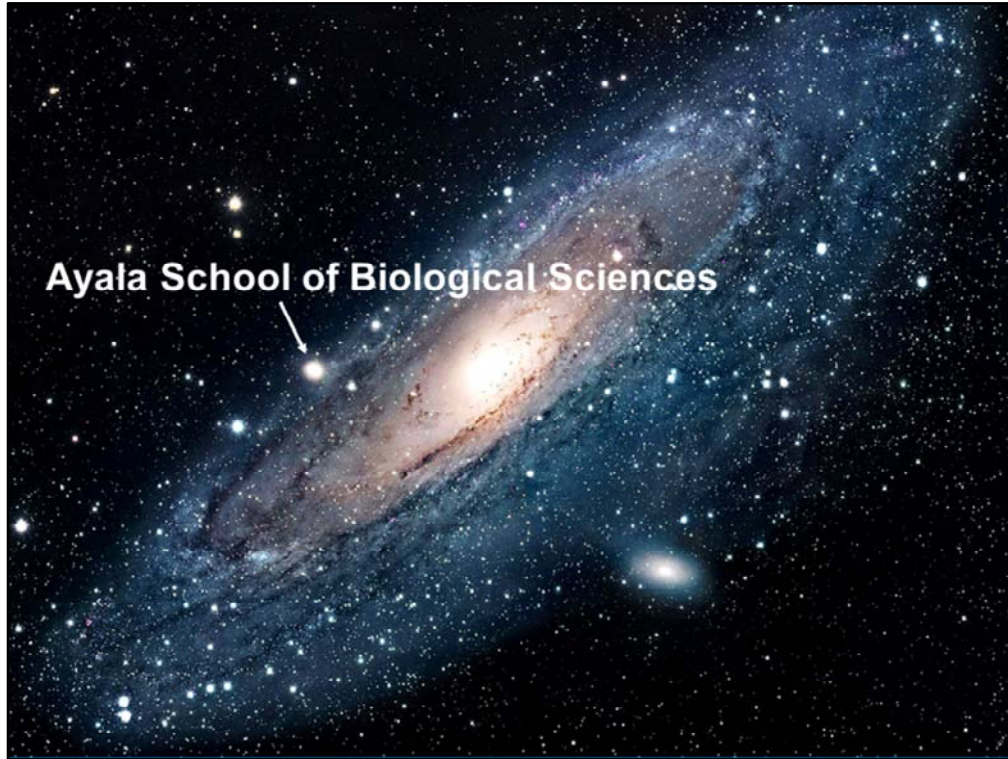
- If Josh was tasked with wanting to know UCI's place in the universe, I was tasked with figuring out our school's place in the galaxy.

- Within my first two days, I was given a list of question from Frank, our Dean, on our undergraduate and graduate students, our departments, and our faculty.
- He asked…
    - "How and where did we fall among similar schools?"
    - "What's the average time to degree for our doctoral students?"
    - "How many grant proposals are the faculty submitting?"

- What the Dean wanted was a holistic overview of the strengths and weaknesses of our school. What areas are we excelling in? What areas did we need to focus and improve on?
- Time and time again, Frank would say, "Tell me a story with the data."

- Before my position was created, the decision making process and data use was much different.
- It wasn't that they weren't making data-driven decisions, it was that they would have to tap into multiple individuals to gather the data
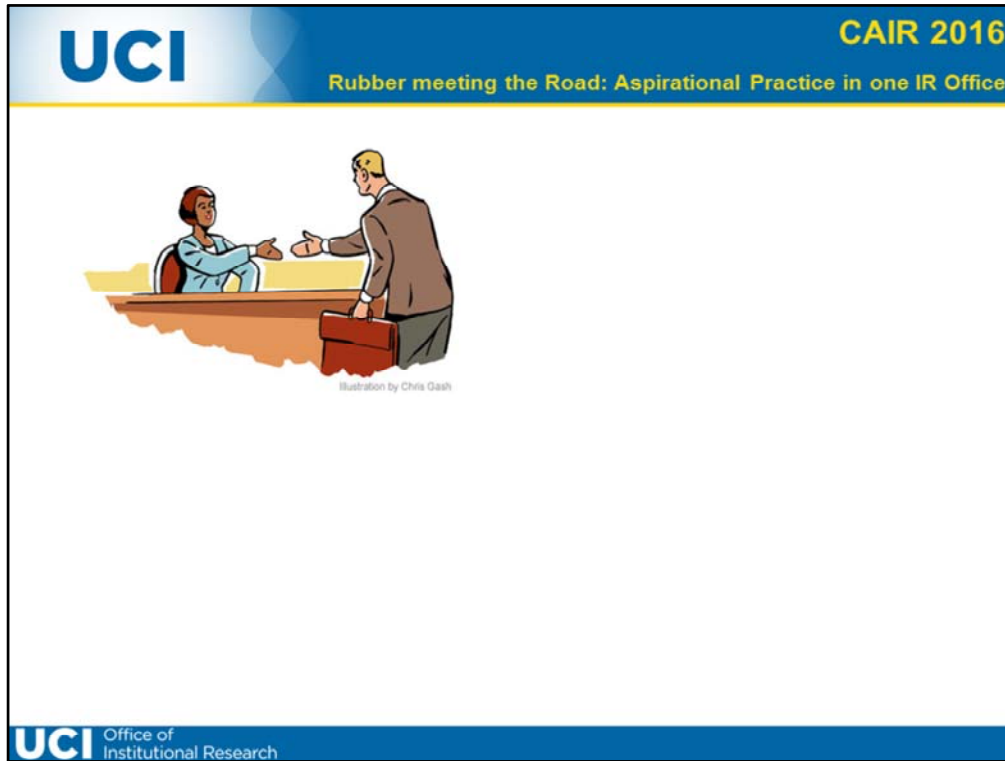
- They were individuals like our School's personnel

- or finance directors

- our department administrators
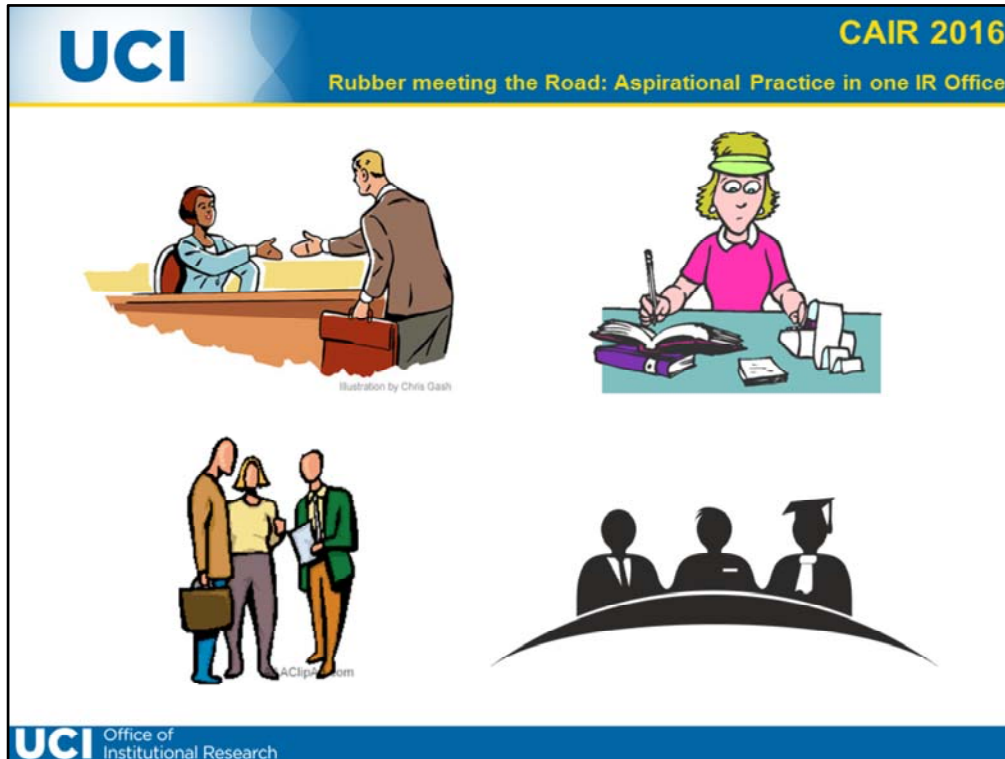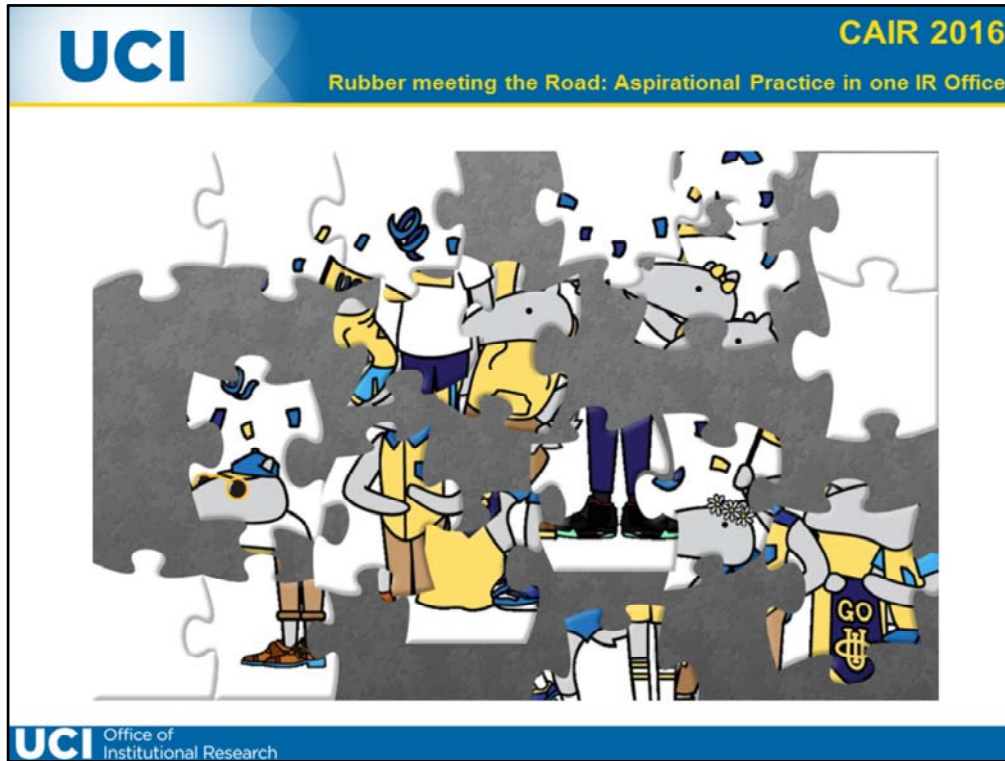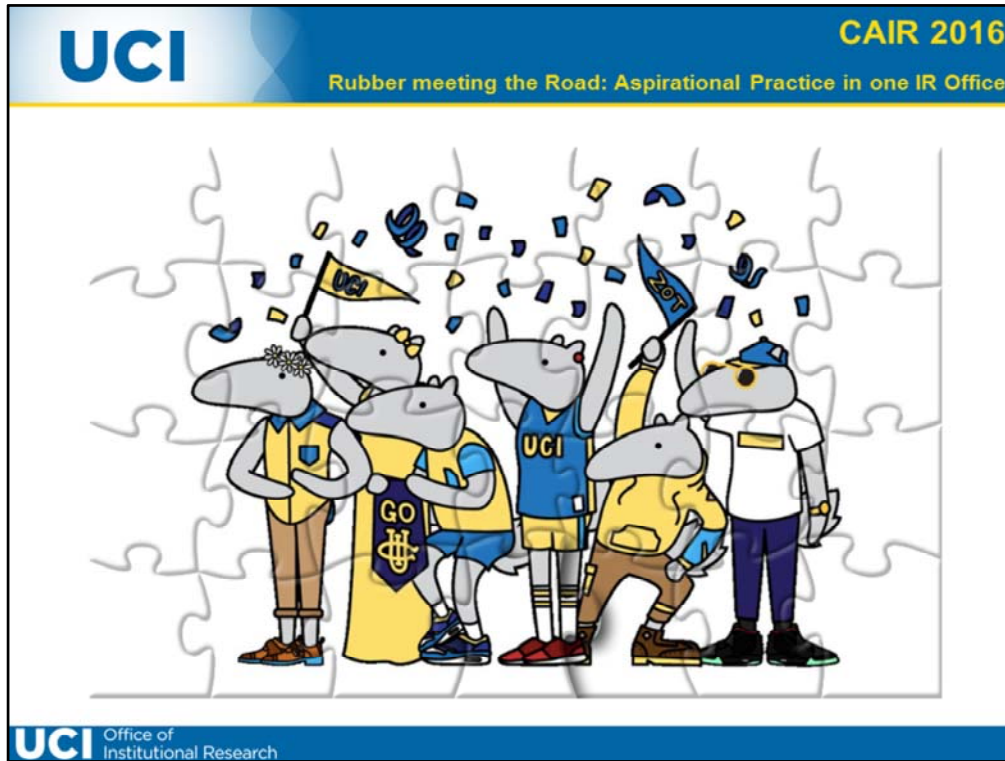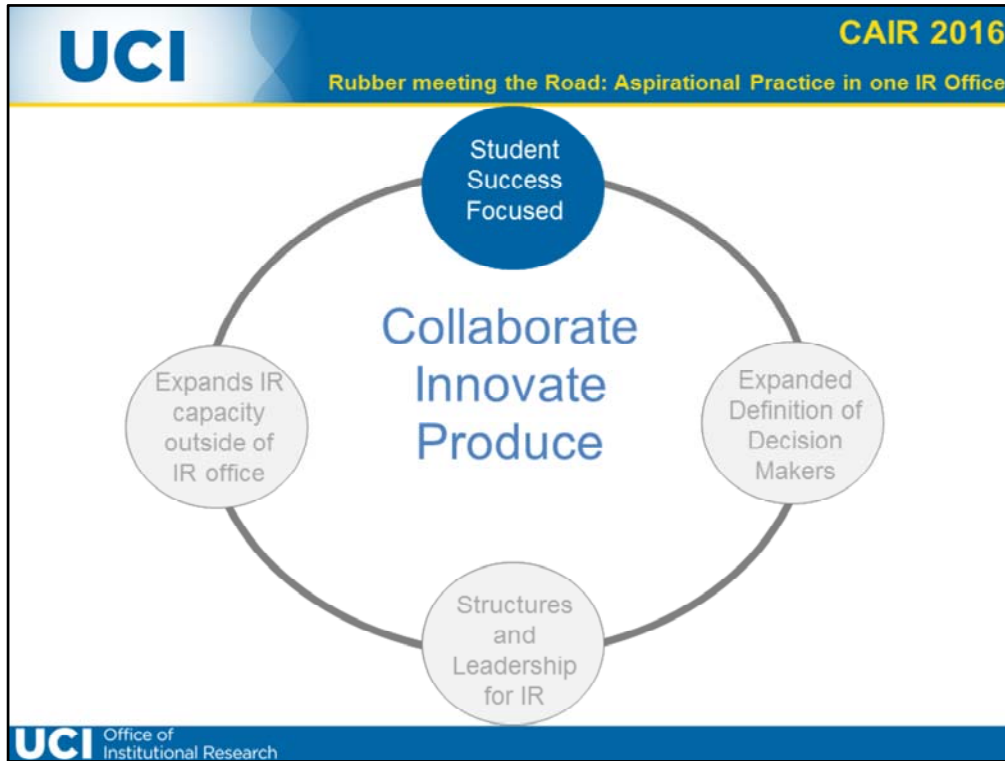
- or our associate deans
- and it would take time.

- Granted, it still takes time, but information comes much faster than it did before.

- There are also stories that they just couldn't find out because of the non-integrated nature of the previous process...
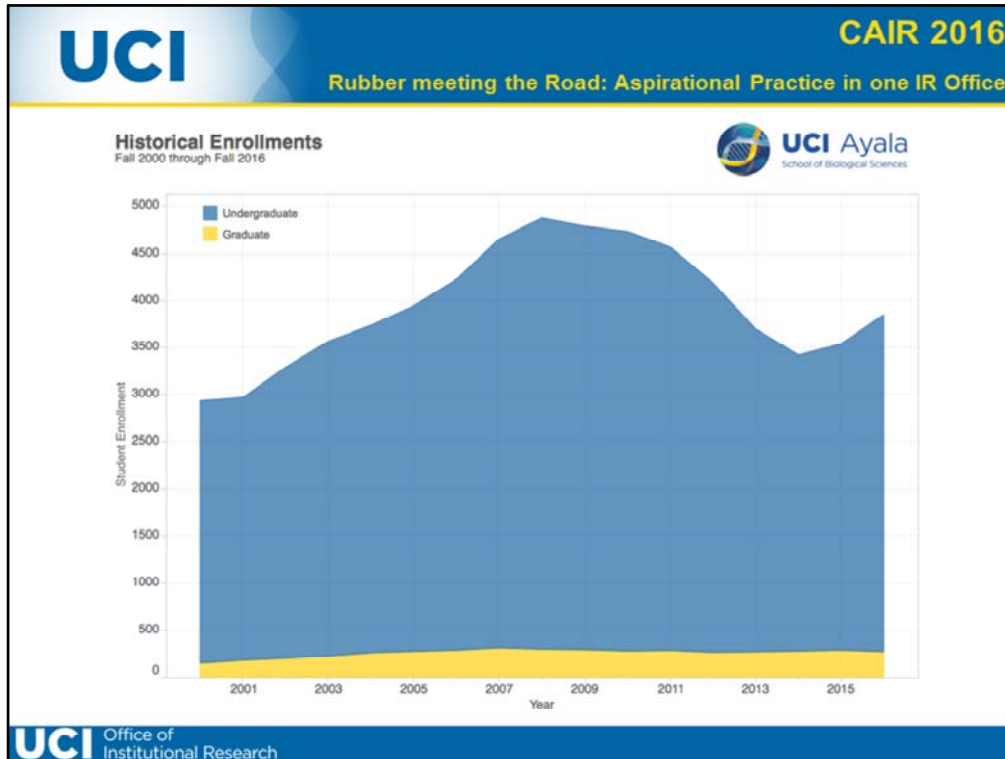
- And so things were looked at in parts

- Rather than as a whole…

- Some of the requests that have come in are as simple as looking at the historical enrollments in our school.

- We knew what our numbers were, but using new tools to visualize it played a critical role in telling a story.
- We saw huge declines in our undergraduate enrollment in the past five years, but seeing it in a visual format sparked a lot of discussion among different stakeholders in our School
    - both staff and faculty
- It made us realize that this dip in enrollment was due to incredibly student-hostile policies that were implemented around the time of the decline.
    - These were things like…
        - If students majored in our school as a freshmen, they *had* to complete their degrees within 4 years or change majors.
        - There were contracts related to the sequencing of courses in their first year that didn't allow for much flexibility.
- We were essentially pushing students away.
- Since then, we've changed our policies to be more student-friendly and to give our students a chance to succeed.
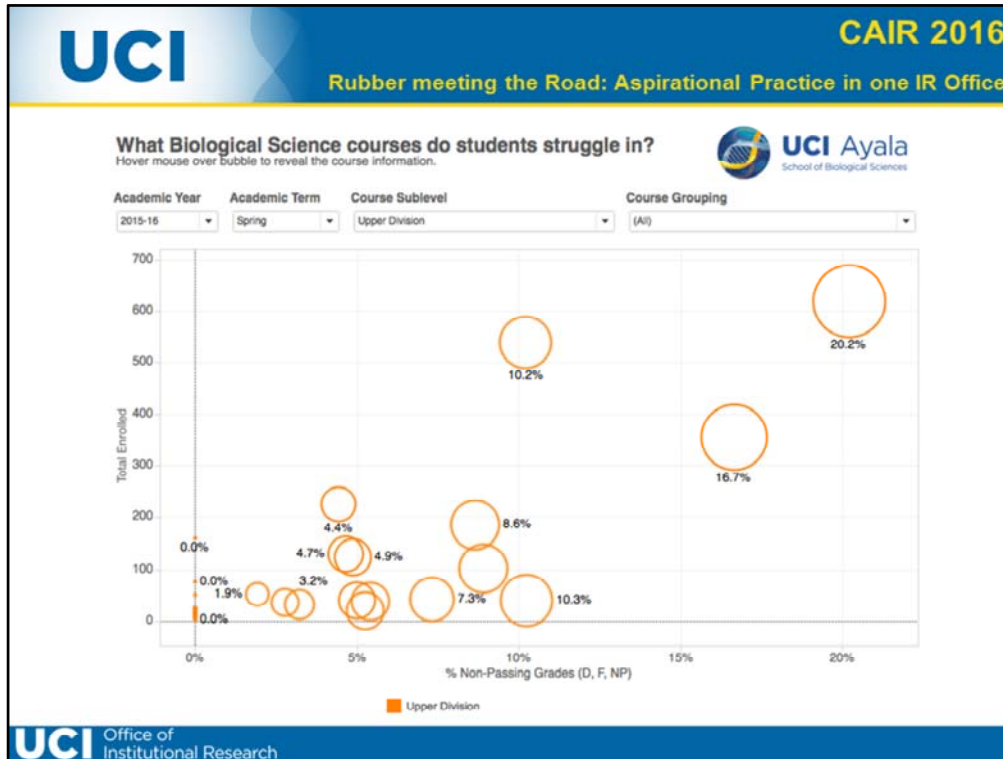
- What started off as an exploration of courses our students struggled in sparked discussion like the visualization of our historical enrollments
    - This time a lot of "why's" came up
    - Why are we seeing a relatively high percentage of non-passing grades for some courses compared to others?

- The thing was that these weren't lower division courses, the courses that were known to be difficult for first time college students
- … these were upper division courses that were designed for majors and presumably, by the time they were juniors or seniors, they were courses that these upperclassmen would excel in.

- We're now figuring out why this might be the case.

- It brings up questions like
    - "Is it because faculty are grading on a curve?" or
    - "Are they consistently performing poorly?"
    - Our student affairs director thought it might be transfer students in their first quarter, some of who were transitioning from a semester system, and so it's sort of an anomaly
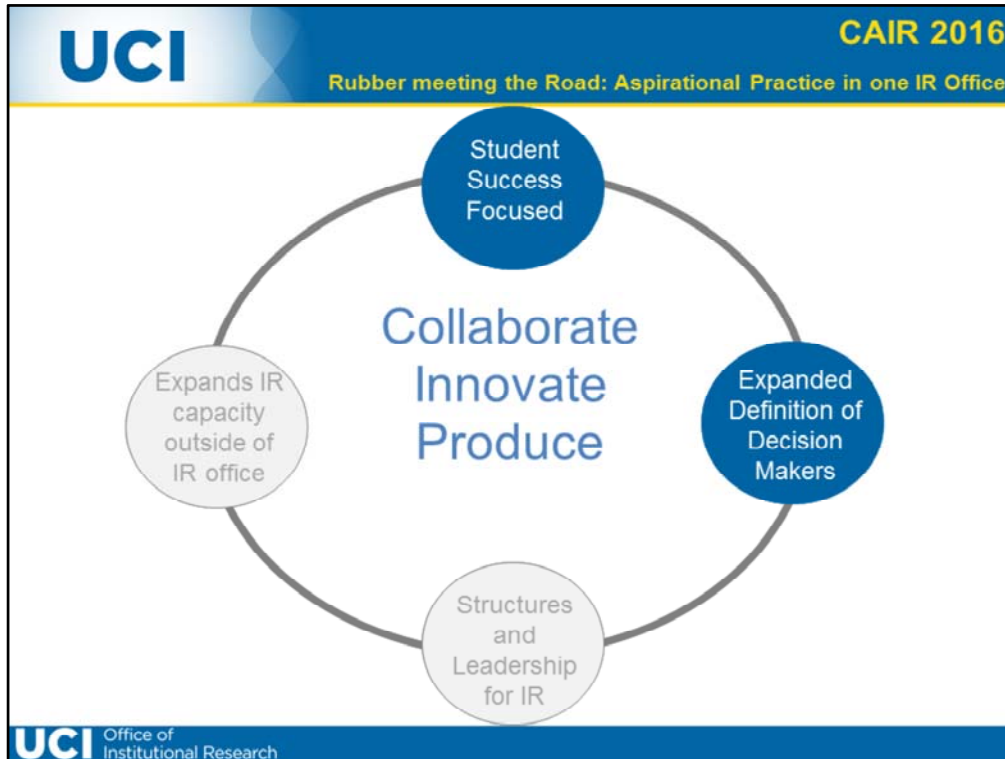
- Seeing the courses that students struggle in has at least brought awareness
    - to the department chairs
    - the faculty
    - and our student affairs office who now use this as a tool when advising students.

- All of these inquiries were made with students in mind and being intentional on how we can create an environment for them to succeed.
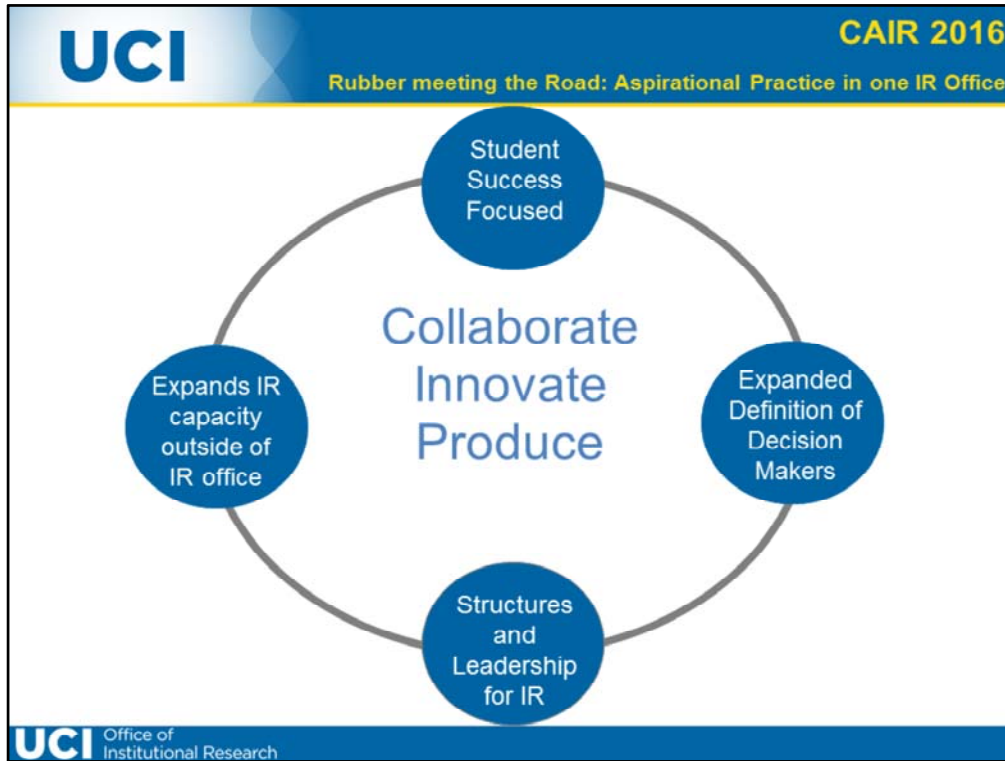
- A large component of my work involves coming up with creative ways to engage our school's decision makers in our data.

- One way we're doing this is beyond standard reporting
- and creating these interactive dashboards with more digestible data pieces
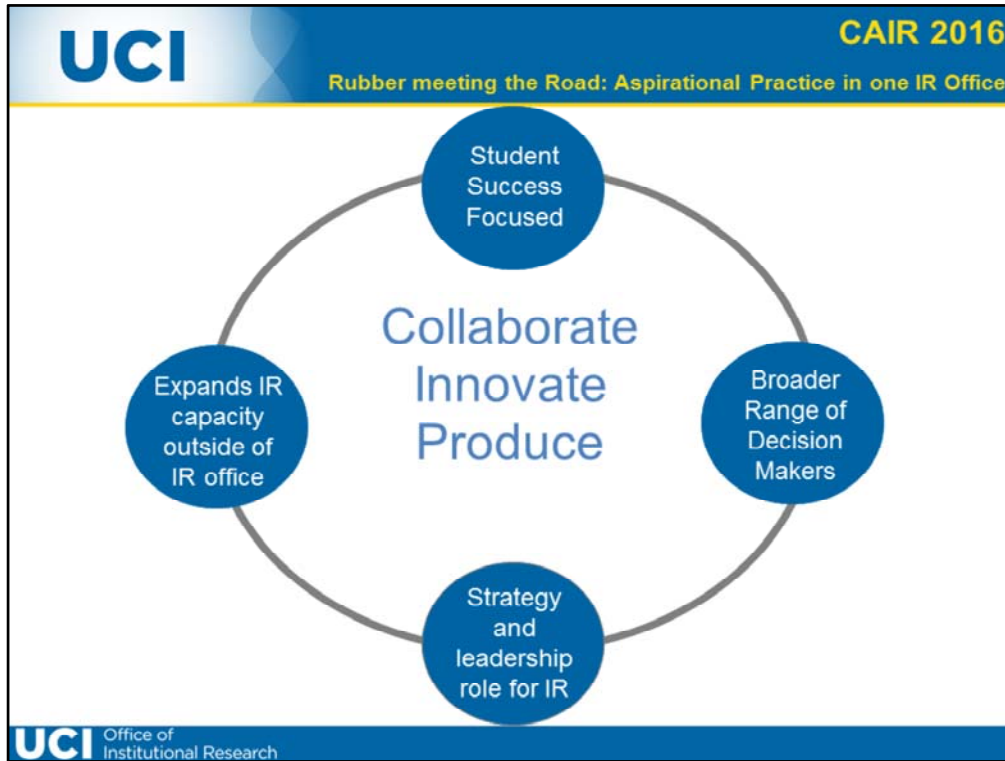
- It pushes them
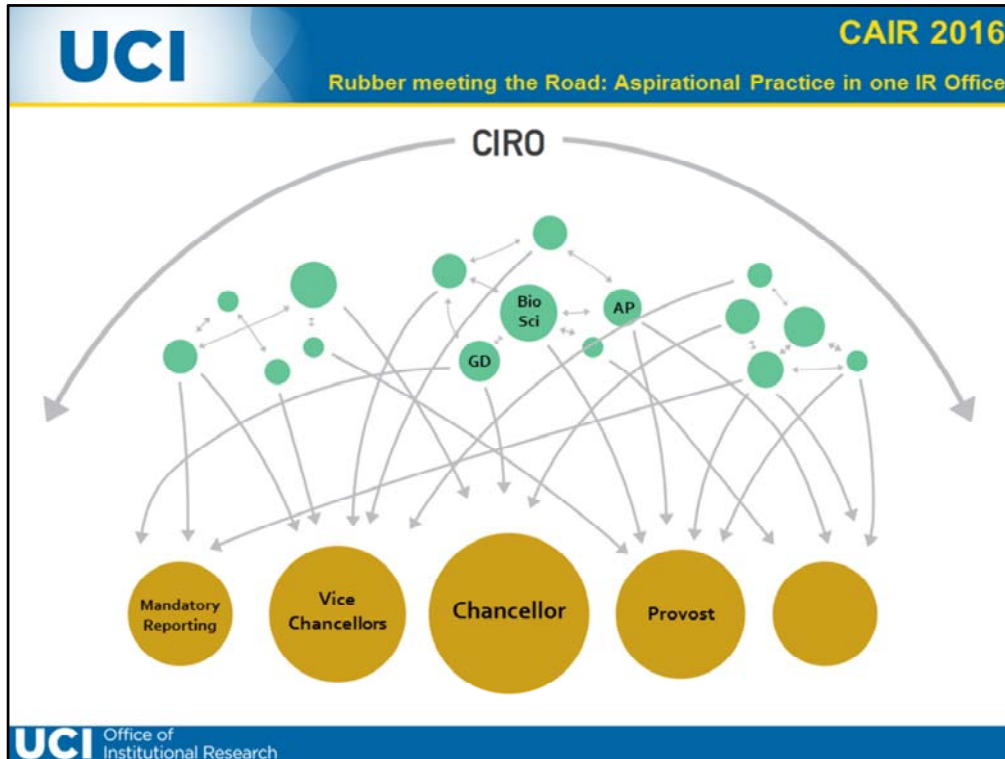
- My position as a satellite IR analyst is essentially IR leaving the central office and moving away from the "ranked clients" model.
- It's a given that I collaborate with the central office, but being housed within a School allows me to serve our needs.
- It allows me to come up with innovative solutions to complex issues that are nuanced to the school.
    - And it allows me to disseminate information for what's critical.

- The logistics and process of this position hasn't always been easy though.
- We're face with answering questions from
    - "How do I go about getting access to data?" to
    - "Is this indicator or variable being tracked?"

- With this last question, I've come to realize that not everything is housed within IR and there are other units that I'll have to get data from.
- We tackle data management and ownership issues. For things that aren't within IR, we've taken initiative to start curating our own datasets.

- By working in an academic unit, I get more of a micro view of what's happening on campus whereas most analysts have a macro view.
- Overall, people have been receptive and supportive of this position.

- But it doesn't just serve Biological Sciences.
    - It allows the whole campus to be better served as School-level issues we face are fed back to the central office.
    - It gives them a better understanding of what's needed in the units,
   - Which in effect, allows them to effectively provide information that will make for positive changes across the campus.

My colleagues have taken the key principals found in the Statement of Aspirational Practice, as well as the key things that I value from my IR office, and described how the Statement of Aspirational Practice fits with the work that they do.
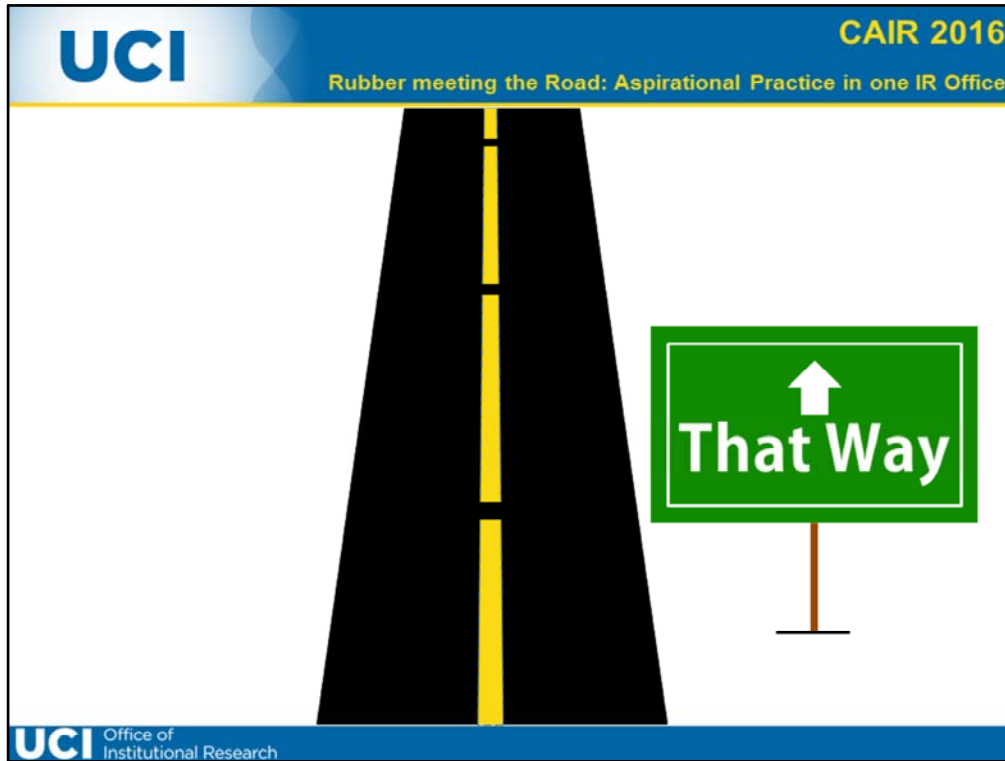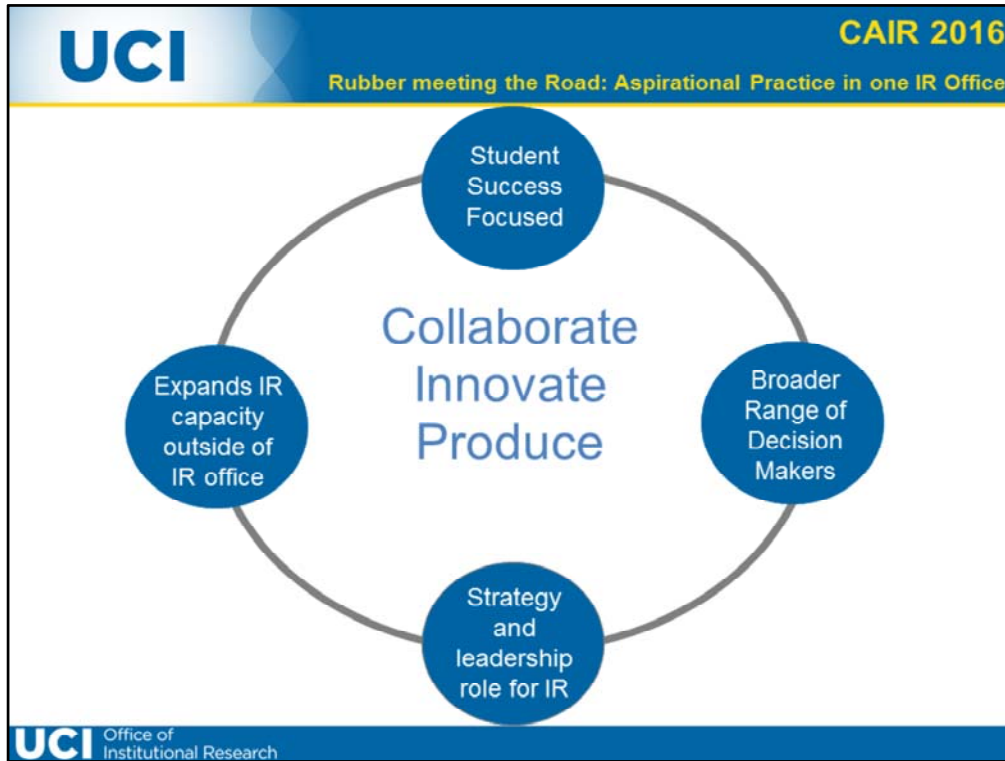
What we have heard from Josh is from one of those most "macro" of views that we can have, how does the Statement fit with working on a campuses' Strategic Plan?
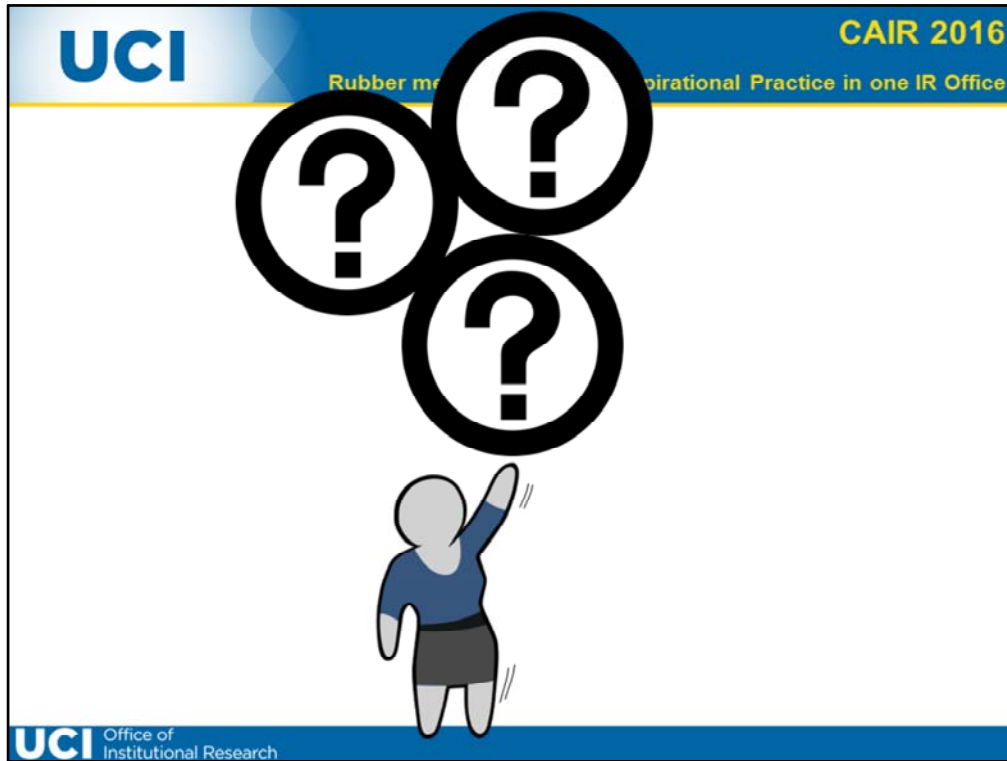
Does it fit with the work involved? Does it support it?

As he described the tasks before us, and how we responded to them, yes, I would say that the statement of aspirational practice fits well with the work that we had in hand.

Working with a multitude of segments on campus,

gathering their insights and perspectives,

synthesizing the results for decision-makers

so they can develop pillars to build upon,
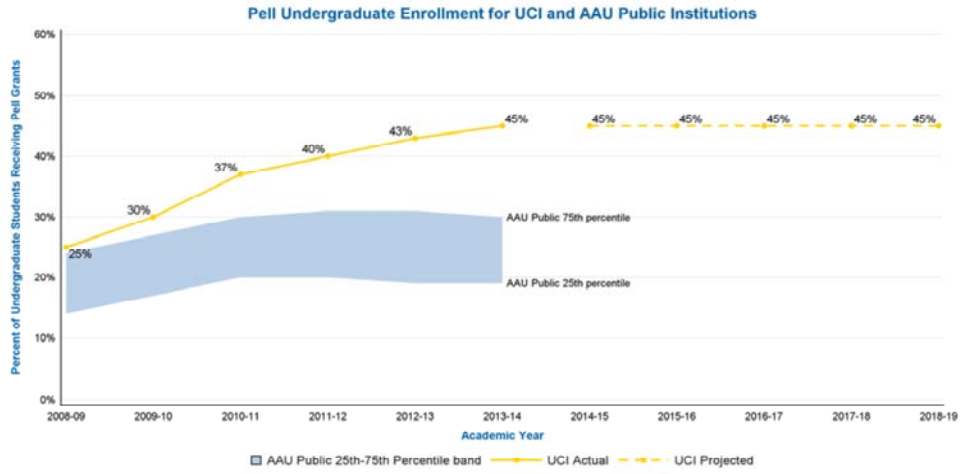
and working with key stakeholders to gather and develop benchmark metrics was quite the task.
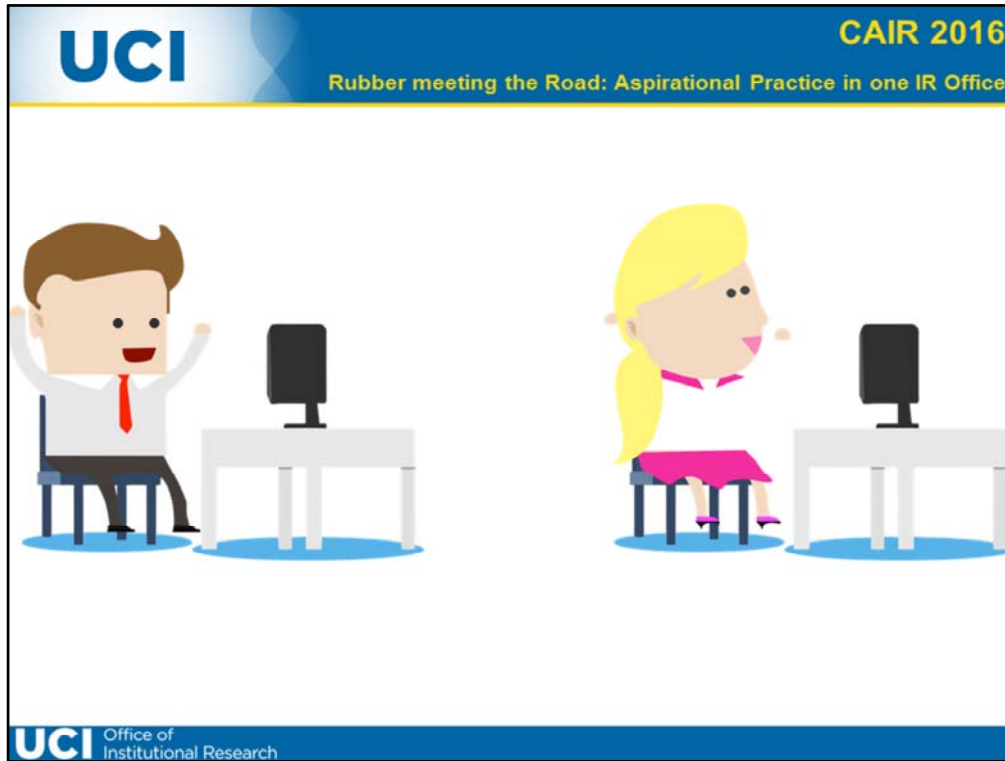
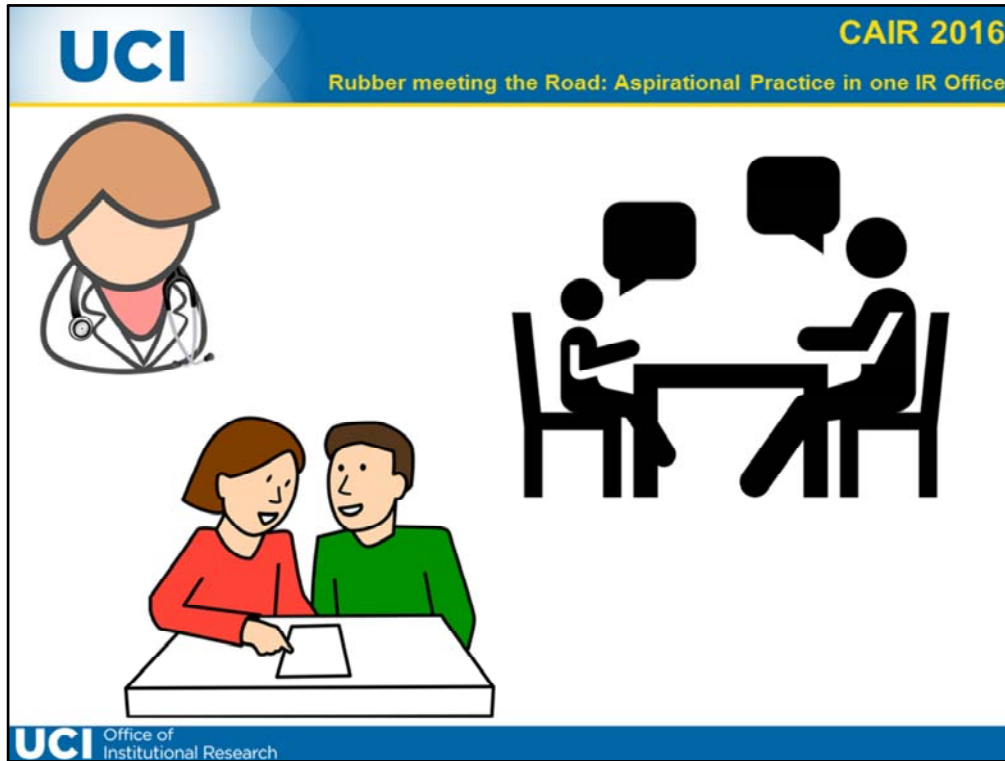What we heard from Ryan was about some of the networking activities

and collaboration with other units

and how institutional research activities can support the decision making at a more unit and area level.

Helping them think about data, and how to work with it to develop insights for their area or program. Planting the seeds of institutional research activities beyond our office.
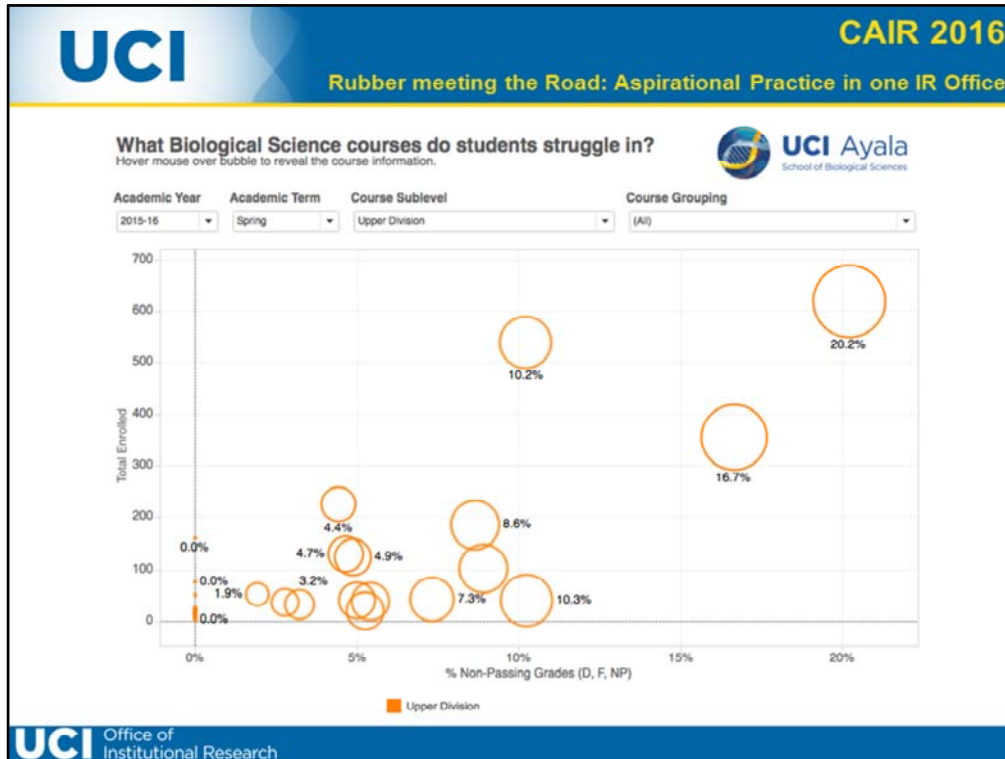
Finally, we have our IR toddler, Randy. New to the profession, and being placed into a new role on campus, for him, his unit, and for the main IR office. We are working at removing the barriers that make it difficult to work together while being separate,
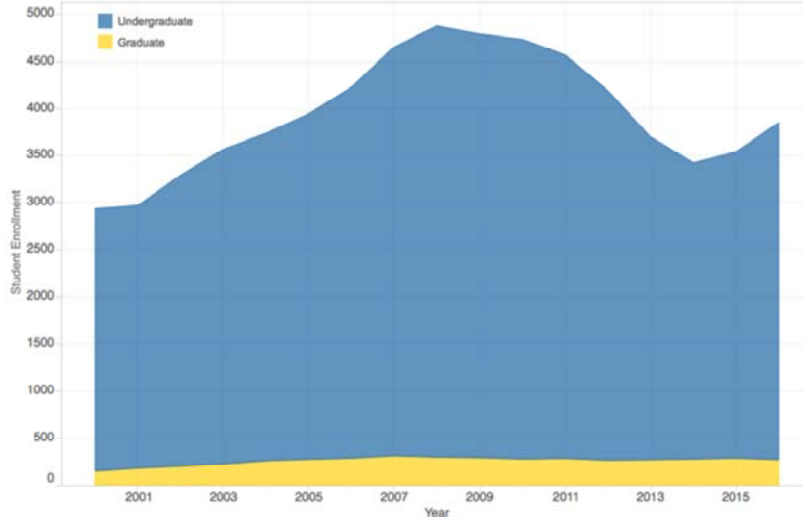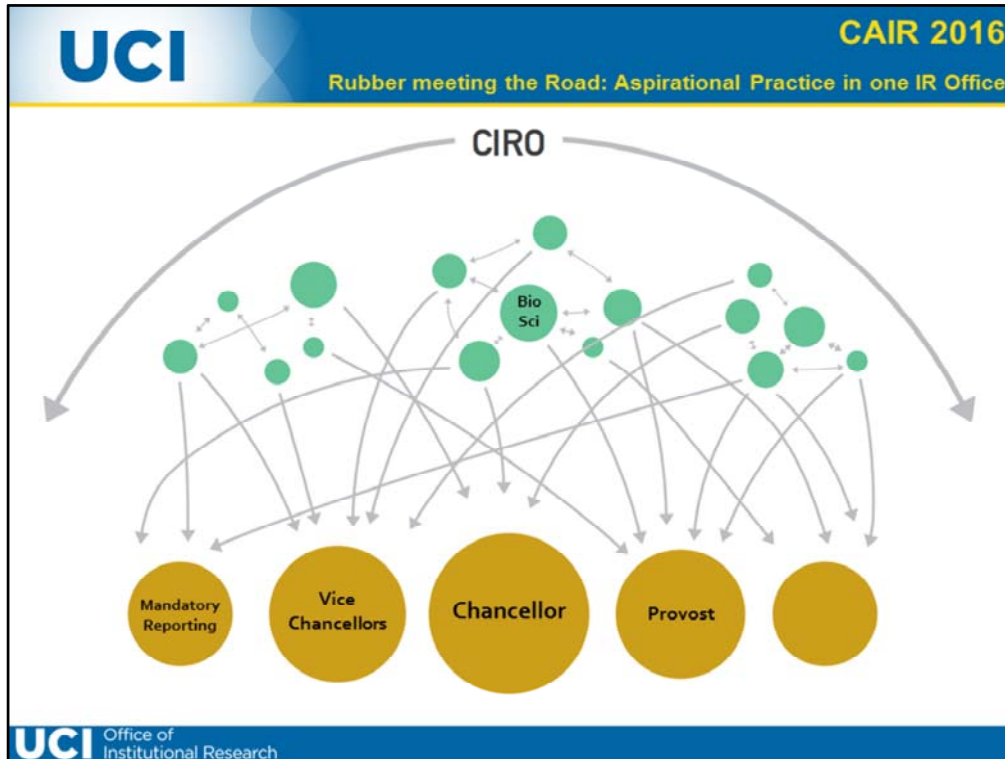
as we strive toward making the information that his dean needs accessible.

And he helps us by shining a light for us into the workings and information needs of an academic unit.

So, how does the Statement of Aspirational Practice fit from my view and role as the Chief Institutional Research Officer on campus?

Well, I like the fit. I found that the Statement reinforced many of the things that we are doing and attempting to do on campus.
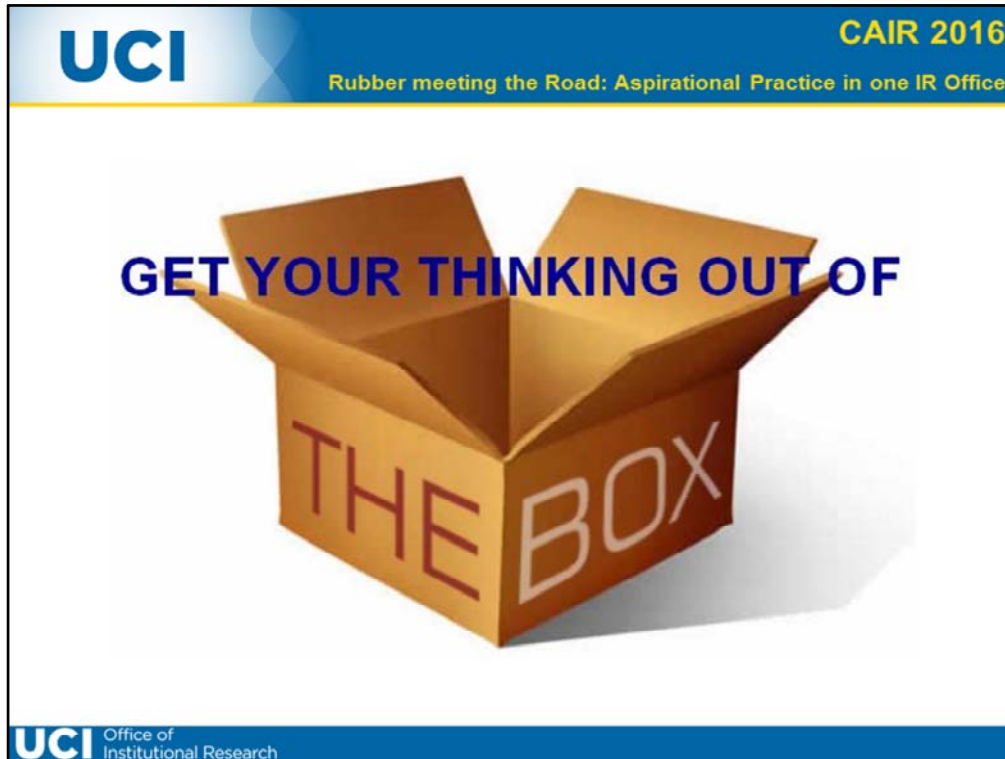
It reinforces and supports my efforts at collaboration,

and gives me some wind at my back to encourage me in these efforts, from the standpoint of my colleagues in my profession, because it is clear they also believe that it is of value.
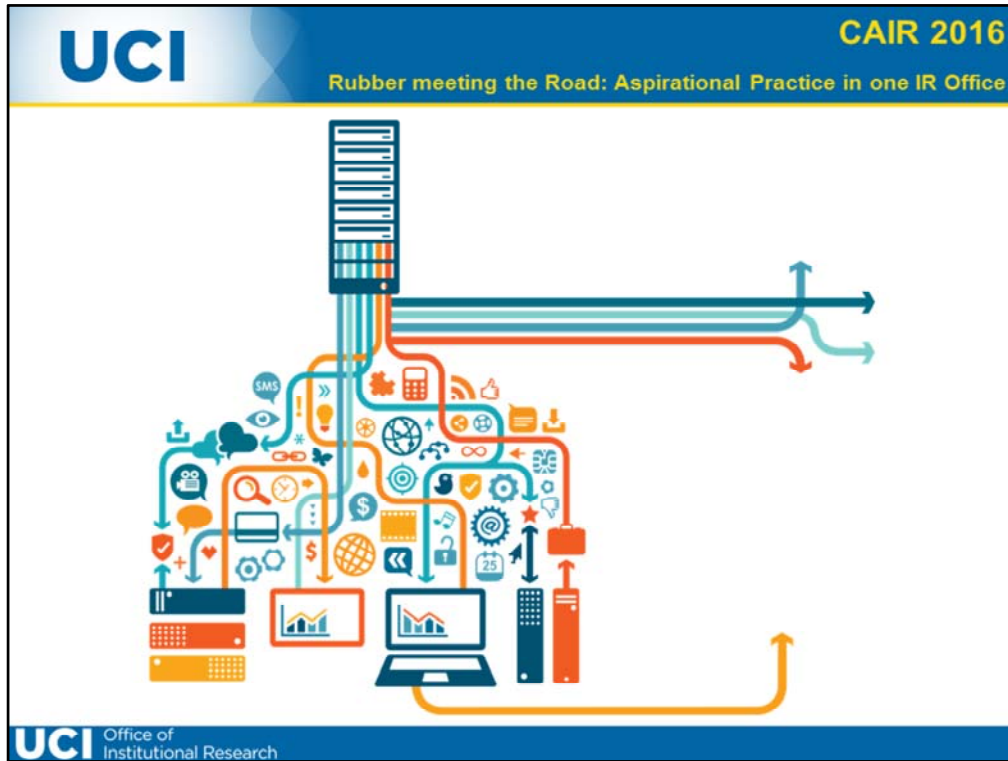
It encourages me to continue to work at being innovative, but with an eye on how innovation can help institutional research…
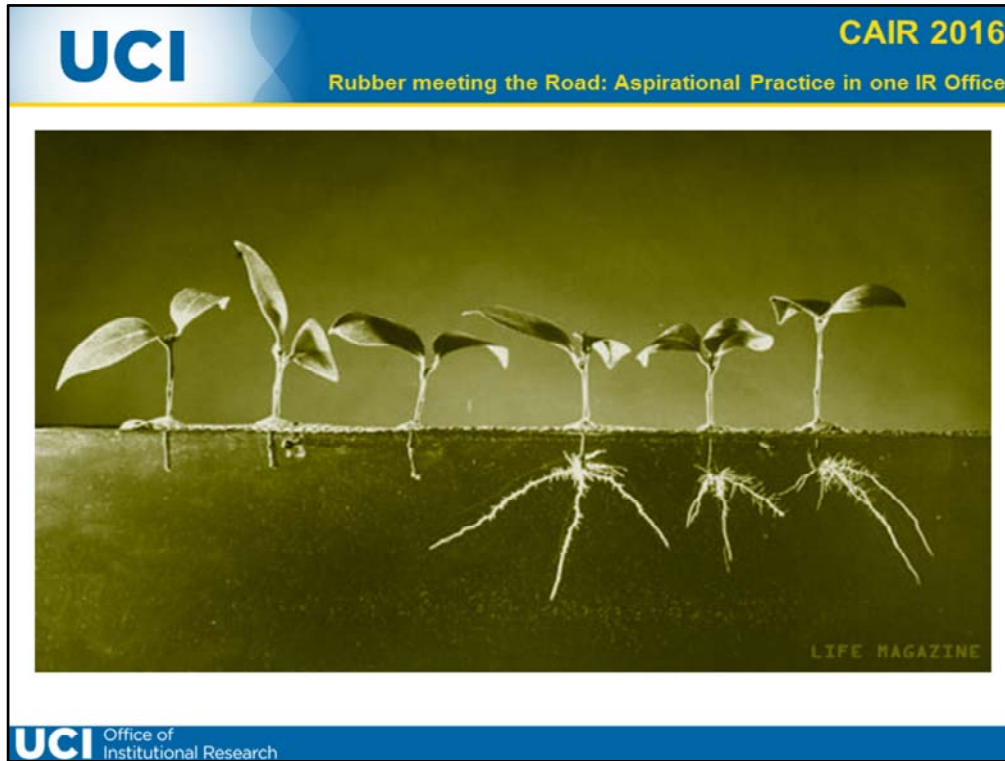
not only happen well in my office,

but in offices across the campus.

I have to continue to find and develop ways that data resources can be expanded and made accessible to a wider range of hands and minds across campus,

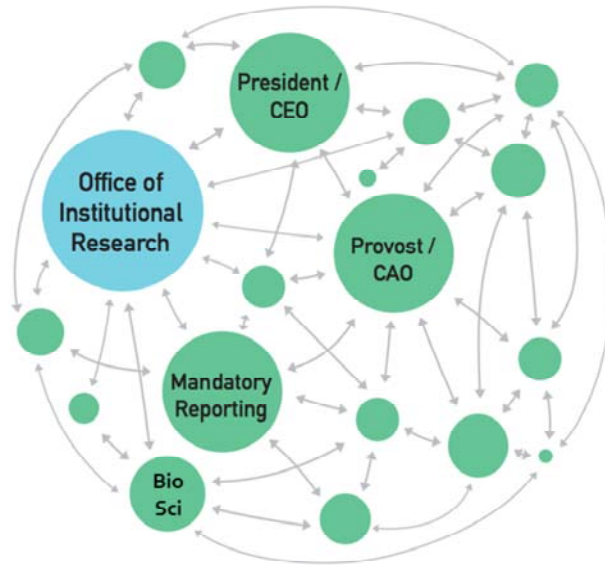as institutional research activities take root and develop in areas around my campus.

What I find most useful about the Statement is that it also makes me mindful of what I do and why I do it.
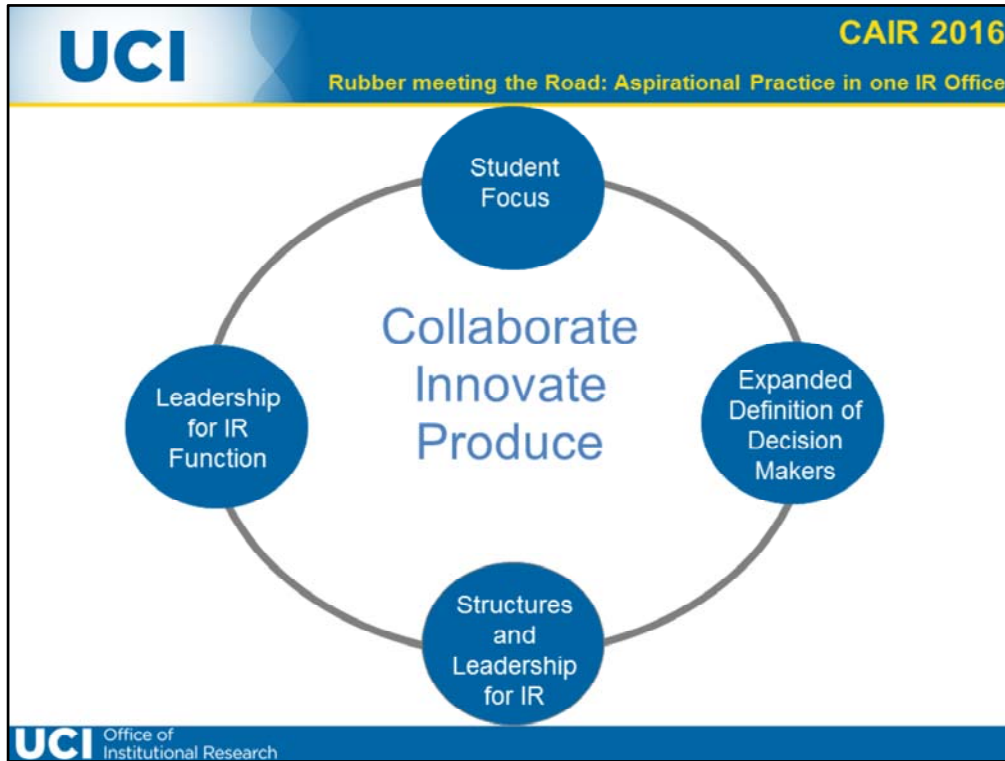
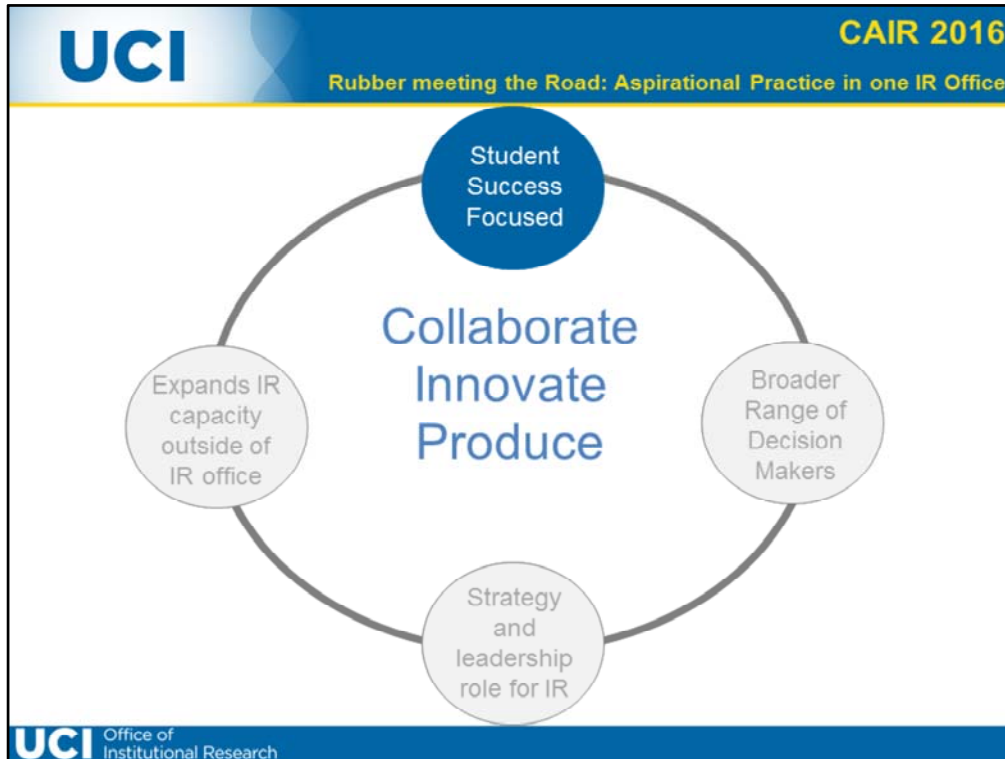It provides a lens with which we can view our tasks and activities,

so that we can better see the whole, and the connections between what we do in our work

and how that work supports decision-making across the campus, whether it is my office generating the report, or another office, which is making use of our official data sources and analytical models.
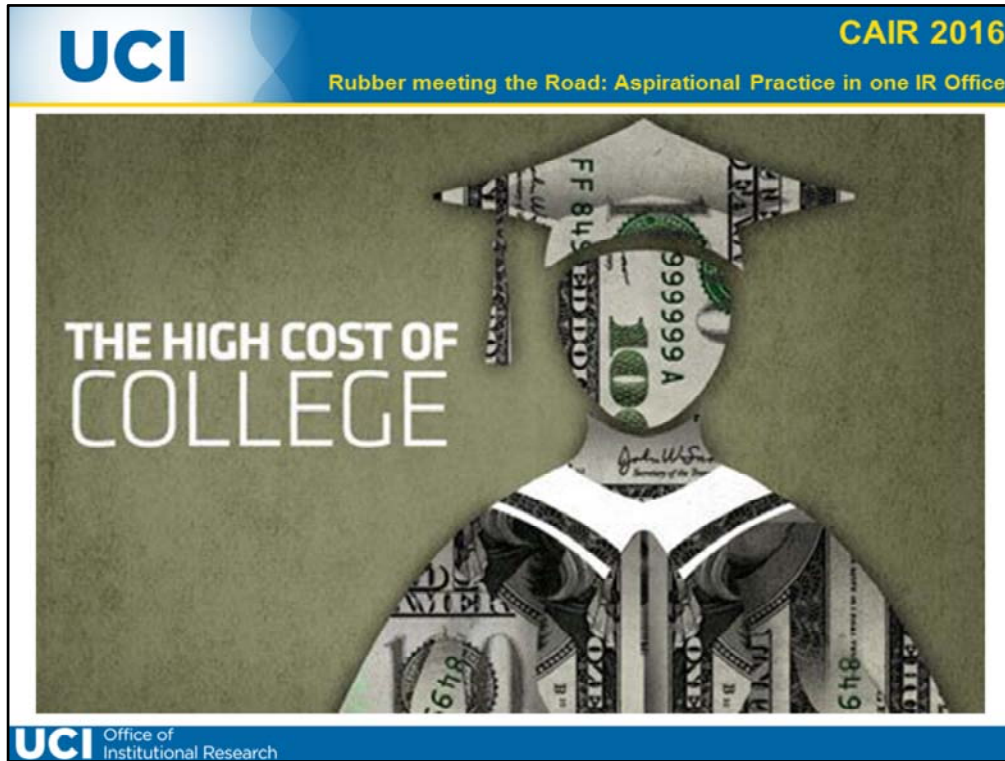
And probably and most importantly, it also reminds me of why we are here... How can the work we do help our institution get better at providing students with successful outcomes in a timely and cost effective manner?

We are not the ones teaching in the classroom,

we are not the ones meeting with students when they face challenging academic or personal times,

we are not the ones making sure that they are able to pay their bills and not going without meals.

But we are the ones that can provide data on any systemic issues in our classrooms that might be causing difficulties for students,

we are the ones who can help pull data together that can help develop the signals and the flags that can allow advisors to be proactive in their discussions with students,

and we are the ones that can provide the data and research that helps our campus develop new ideas on managing the cost of education, making sure our students have the needed financial support and food security to be successful.

Because that is what it is all about, that is why I enjoy what I do, even on those days dedicated to compliance reporting, so I can participate in making sure that the next generation has opportunities toward success. Does the statement of Aspirational Practice fit?

It fits darn good… (with a final nod to our hotel, the Biltmore…)