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NCCCRP Board

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Morest
- Membership Cor.
-Ellen McGregor
- Secretary
-Fonda Vera
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TRIVIA

Baskin Robbins Ice Cream makers once tried to produce and market an ice cream product with what vegetable flavoring?

***Answer on the back page**

www.triviacafe.com

Editor's Note

Happy Spring everyone! I hope you have enjoyed this year's issues of e-Parameters. As we begin a new year with new leadership (see page 2), we will begin a new volume with the next issue. As always, I welcome any feedback on the structure and content of the newsletter, and especially as we move forward with a new board. I want to thank all of the members who contributed to e-Parameters throughout the year. This volume was full of engaging and thoughtful material, much of it written by NCCCRP members, which made this a very enjoyable and rewarding editing experience for me. Thanks!

President's Message

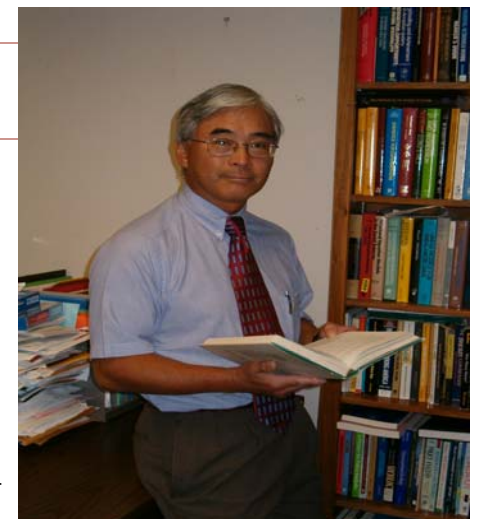
It's hard these days to report a happy story or development. The downturn in the economy has besieged us at work and at home with incessant crises. Hardly any of us can tout an immunity to the ill effects of the economy (both the global and national levels).

So, the need for professional association—social support and networking—has reached a new peak amidst this economic trough we've experienced. Because our jobs have grown more difficult over time, we actually need professional associations more than before. It seems frivolous to the public when researchers convene an IR meeting in person or online so it can be difficult to substantiate the need for professional association. But the sustainability of IR may depend upon buoying the attitudes of IR's and equipping them with expertise. If IR's grow overly cynical about their work or obsolete in their knowledge, the IR population may decline in its output and its numbers. But I hinted at a happy story earlier. It's the example that I recently saw with California's IR group, the Research & Planning Group for California Community Colleges. The organization went against the tide of contraction (shrinking activities and expenses) to hold the first stand-alone RP Conference in the last few years. More than a hundred IR's from around the state attended the event in Pomona, which offered an affordable conference site. Before this 2010 conference, community college IR's had been meeting at the state-level as part of a joint conference with other professional associations—to share costs and to reduce the risk of low turnouts.

The 2010 RP Conference was a hit. Even this cynical person felt



Editor Darby Kaikkonen, South Puget Sound Community College



President Willard Hom, California Community Colleges

re-invigorated and better-informed after my attendance. I just hope that other groups (professional associations) can continue (or begin?) to bolster professional association—social support and networking—that spurs individual effort, creativity, and collaboration. In this case, California is still a leader.

Willard C. Hom, Director, Research & Planning, Chancellor's Office, California Community Colleges

Affiliate News



2010 Forum
Registration Now Open

The 50th annual AIR Forum is upon us. See the link below for all of the details for this historic event starting **May 29th, 2010.**

<http://forum.airweb.org/>

NCCCRP Best Paper Award for the 2010 AIR Forum

A panel of NCCCRP board members has reviewed a competitive set of submissions for the 2010 NCCCRP Best Paper Award. The panel, led by Mary Goodhue Lynch, has named Roger Mourad and JiHee Hong of Washtenaw Community College (Ann Arbor, Michigan) as the winners. Their paper is "Factors Associated with Bachelor Degree Attainment by Community College Transfer Students," and Dr. Mourad will present the paper at the upcoming AIR Forum in Chicago at the NCCCRP Best Paper session. NCCCRP will cover \$250 of his travel/registration for the AIR Forum. Credit also goes to William Michael Wood, Ellen McGregor, and Vanessa Morest for volunteering to serve on the review panel.

The paper's abstract describes the work as follows:

"This case study examines the effectiveness of the community college as preparation for bachelor degree attainment, by comparing community college transfers who complete bachelor degrees to transfers who do not complete it over an 8 year period. Students who earned a greater number of credits over a shorter period of time at the community college with a higher GPA were significantly more likely to graduate from the baccalaureate institution. This finding held for both traditional and reverse transfers. These results raise a question about the relationship between sustained academic success at the community college and bachelor degree attainment."

NCCCRP Election Results

The ballot booth has closed, and the results of the 2010 NCCCRP election are as follow:

William Michael Wood (currently our Region 6 director) has been voted in as President-elect. He will succeed Vanessa Morest when her tem as NCCCRP President expires. Ellen McGregor won re-election as Membership coordinator, and Fonda Vera won re-election as Secretary.

The membership within each region also re-elected Debra Rathke (Region 3 director), Arlene Santos-George (Region 5 director), Darby Kaikkonen (Region 9 director), and Mary Day (Region 10 director). Julie Melnick (Northeast Community College in Norfolk, Nebraska) is the new director for Region 7. Patrick Sanger (Alvin Community College in Texas) is the new director for Region 8, and Andrew LaManque (De Anza College in Cupertino, California) is the new director for Region 11.

There was no candidate on the ballot for Indiana (Region 4), and there were no write-in ballots. In the future, the NCCCRP Board may need to revise the regional territories to merge Indiana with an adjoining region for representation. Individuals who have an interest in serving the NCCCRP, either as an officer, regional director, or some other volunteer role should contact Willard C. Hom (the outgoing president) at whom@cccco.edu or Vanessa Morest (the incoming president) at VMorest@ncc.comnet.edu.



Researcher 's Toolbox

Using an Index to be Selective

Many times, in our work with transcript files, we have to work with a specific type of course and need to only sort out specific records. By this, I mean, I only need, say, freshman English courses or developmental (or transitional as they are called on my campus) courses. In this process, it seems that we always find some “dirty” data. An example of that is when you expect the data to be uppercase and they are not, or, certain numbers to have leading zeroes. Then, when the “select if” statement is used, not all the records are selected because of a lower case “m” for “Male” that some data entry person forgot to use the shift key on. An easy fix, right? If a “gender” field is string, and you want to make sure all the cases are in uppercase, a simple SPSS statement will do the trick.

```
Compute gender=upcase(gender).
```

In fact, if I am going to compare names, I will do something like the following – to avoid all the possibilities:

```
If (upcase(collegename) eq 'BRAZOSPORT') returning_college=1.
```

However, this may not be good enough, because of different field characteristics and lengths of, in this case, college names. Suppose the “collegename” field is a string variable, 12 bytes long. It contains names such as Brazosport, ALVIN, LEE, Galveston, etc. I only want to select the records with the name Brazosport in the field and keep that record; and I know that the data entry folks were not too careful about upper and lower case. So, I’ll give you a way to do this.

```
Select If (index( upcase(collegename), 'BRAZOSPORT') gt 0).
```

The “upcase” function changes the names in the field to uppercase (temporarily) and the index function compares “Brazosport” with the name in the field and returns a value of the starting position if there is a match. So the value of “1” is returned when “Brazosport” is found and the record is kept. In this example I am only keeping a particular type of record.

Here is one more example to expand the idea of the “index” function. Again, I am going to use transcript records, which have courses in each record and section numbers. There are certain section numbers I don’t use in certain tallies. This time, there is a list in the first part of the “index” function, so whatever section is actually in the “section” field is compared with all that is in the list and if a match is found, the value of the position is returned.

```
Select if (index('00 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 ',section) eq 0).
```

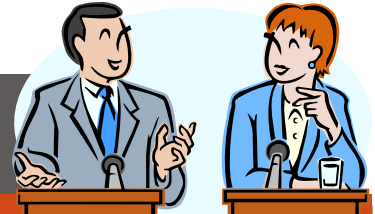
Am I getting rid of these records or keeping them? If the section number is in the list, a number greater than zero is returned, and therefore, only records with section numbers that are not in the list are kept. Slick, huh? I use the “index” function quite a bit.

Can you write the code to only keep the departments you want to analyze from a transcript file using what I showed you above using the variable “dept”?

Hopefully you can find some use for this tip. If you have a question about SPSS syntax (not SPSS statistics), please let me know – David.Preston@brazosport.edu

Note: SPSS has changed the name of index to char.index

David Preston,
Brazosport College



“Perspectives”

Topic: Will Community Colleges Outsource IR?

Original Post

In recent months I have noticed some discussion about how budget pressures and calls for leaner administration have branched into comments about the survivability of on-campus IR offices and their staff. In some places, I sadly report, the discussion phase has evolved into an action phase. Some IR people have lost their positions, either forcing the incumbents to return to faculty positions (not the worst-case scenario) or to look for new employment elsewhere (a worst-case scenario in these economic times). In examining the chances (or probability?) of community colleges eliminating their in-house IR positions, we need to tie the potential elimination of in-house IR positions to the potential for outsourcing IR functions.

One specific practice may influence the onset of outsourcing. This practice is the institutional emphasis on “dashboards.” As the focus of analyses in IR has moved towards accountability that is “transparent,” I have seen a trend toward dashboard development as a modern response. Apparently many citizens and many administrators also attach credibility to the use of high technology (assuming that high technology saves the college money and that it presents an image of innovative philosophy among the college’s administrators), and this seems to add momentum to the development of dashboards.

There is nothing inherently disadvantageous about dashboards. But the trend toward a focus on dashboard development may augur a trend away from traditional IR work. If existing IR staff lack the expertise or time to produce dashboards, a college will tend to contract out such projects, especially if administrators view dashboards as primarily a data management task. In addition, administrators and the public may adopt the notion that a dashboard is all that they need to understand a college’s performance. They may not see a need to conduct student or faculty surveys. They may not see the need for ad hoc studies that do not fit neatly into the dashboard framework of thinking. They may simply see less need for the custom work that is not easily standardized. If an administrator can standardize an institution’s analytical work through products like the dashboard, how much need does a college have for IR staff?

Another practice that may influence the outsourcing of IR is much more subtle, and some people may think of it more as “cross-sourcing” than outsourcing. For convenience, this practice may be dubbed as “popularizing research.” Some colleges have begun initiatives to popularize research by sharing data analysis tasks with many other parts of the institution. In this practice, professional IR staff train other staff and faculty to conduct research. Overall, this is a good thing. Every employee at an institution should take an analytical, data-based approach to improving student learning and student outcomes.

But some unintended consequences may also develop. The kinds of analysis that will occur in such a popularizing scenario will tend to involve the least technically demanding methods in IR. This will happen because most non-IR staff/employees will lack the background and time to learn and apply the more technical IR methods. So IR staff who focuses on such training duties will pay less attention to the more technical methods that they may have previously learned. It is therefore possible that IR staff will lose interest, capacity (through “atrophy”), or reduction in time to conduct analyses that apply those more technical methods. If nonuse of technical methods persists, the IR staff may lose the ability to distinguish to administrators their professional competences. In some situations, administrators may begin to make personnel decisions more on the basis of how well they think an IR incumbent or candidate can train other staff or faculty to do basic analyses than on the basis of how thorough or advanced an analysis the incumbent or candidate can perform. In a way, administrators may view some current IR staff as “obsolete” in these terms.

We have little way of knowing how much dashboards and popularizing research will truly affect the IR labor market in the community colleges. But it may help us to adapt to a changing environment if we envision a possible scenario. Individual IR staff may sustain their work assignments if they can handle dashboard development themselves (a tall order in some cases) and if they show good skill in training non-IR individuals to do analyses. The other adaptive strategy would involve the IR person’s ability to demonstrate to his/her employer



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Continued Original Post

that the professional skills he/she can exercise are relatively unique to him/her—and that those skills can produce valued products or services. That IR person would then benefit from the concept of product differentiation (and survive a trend toward task standardization).

It would be remiss to ignore another economic phenomenon that would promote the outsourcing of IR. If higher education continues to experience budget reductions and the corporate world has not begun to increase its staffing, we will see an influx of highly skilled analysts/researchers into the labor market for IR. However, this influx of job-seekers may affect the IR labor market by expanding the number of consulting businesses that would contract with community colleges to perform IR work. If college administrators perceive that they could save funds by moving work to a consulting firm/consultant, and if these administrators perceive that political reactions to such outsourcing were acceptable to them, then we could well see an increase in outsourcing of IR. In this final scenario, the adaptive strategy of IR incumbents would depend upon the competitive nature of the outsourcing alternatives—a relatively local and individualistic situation.

Response to Original Post

Response - Will Community Colleges Outsource IR
Jan W. Lyddon, Ph.D. and Bruce E. McComb

Willard Hom correctly notes the concern about budget effects on community colleges' IR offices. As people who are active with the Achieving the Dream initiative (we are both data facilitators), we advocate for increased IR capacity at colleges, both in terms of building the professional staff in cases where there are none and in building professionalism of staff where there are existing personnel. We are dismayed at the wide-ranging effects of budget cuts on colleges, not just on IR offices but on the many other services that are now in even greater demand. Where we differ with him is on the potential underlying causes of the scale-backs in IR.

If IR is viewed as a commodity, doing standardized things like preparing repeatable reports, then it is likely that IR could be easily outsourced. If, however, IR contributes to the institution's development and execution of its strategy, or to supporting evaluation of its services and outcomes, IR professionals become important contributors to the institution's well being.

Dashboards are simply tools to display the end result of a great deal of strategic thinking. We both work actively in helping IR professionals understand and use tools like dashboards in supporting strategy execution. Presumably that makes us advocates of dashboards, which, like any tool, are highly useful. Also, like any tool, they have their limitations. They cannot solve problems or answer every question. Moreover, we suspect that some software companies may be selling what seem like simple solutions but that are really simplistic solutions. Perhaps they are like the too good to be true diets advertised on late night TV.

Dashboards can only represent reports of events (total students enrolled at a particular time, graduation rate are two examples of point-in-time event-based measures). "...[M]uch analysis in the world goes no deeper than events. Listen to every night's explanation of why the stock market did what it did. Stocks went up (down) because the U.S. dollar fell (rose)...Event-event analysis" (Meadows, 2008 p. 89). Instead, we must go at least one level deeper, to behavior over time, to underlying causes, and system flows. These are areas where dashboards cannot go but that IR professionals and others can. Dashboards and their ilk may, once designed and implemented, speed up the work of representing the events or their measures. But they only go so far. People and deeper analysis have to take the work to the next step.

In our work with dashboards we see important and sophisticated roles for IR professionals in their development and deployment, as well as in continued assistance with maintenance. This enriched role for IR becomes all the more vital to supporting effective decision making within institutions. Rather than being replaced by the



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technology, IR professionals can embrace it to enhance their roles to become more strategically focused and more integral to supporting decision making.

Effective development of dashboards is time-consuming. Defining terms, ensuring the right data and data combinations are used requires considerable time and expertise. An early lesson we learned with computers is that they're very fast once programmed, but the programming and set up take time. The systems are fast but not smart. *People* are smart. Some of the dashboards we've seen are simply more elaborate ways of presenting the same sort of data that traditionally exist. The most effective ones, however, present data and information that are linked to the institution's strategy.

With all due respect to Mr. Hom's argument, some of it reads like the arguments of the Luddites, people who resisted machinery and modernization in early-1800s England. Similar resistance has occurred in rust belt states where industrial workers have resisted movements to increase their education and skills to adapt to increased technology use in their industry. IR professionals would best embrace technology as enhancements to their work and master the new roles available to them.

Dashboards, together with differentiation and adding skills to the decision making within institutions, to our minds, enhances the value of IR professionals rather than diminishing them. The current economic climate is one that might initially cause an IR person to feel very vulnerable. We empathize as we've felt it personally. We also know that IR professionals with excellent strategic thinking skills and ability to master the technology to deliver information rapidly and provide interpretation support can be in high demand.

Reference: Meadows, Donella H. 2008. *Thinking in systems: a primer*. Edited by Diana Wright. White River, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Company.

Jan W. Lyddon, Ph.D., has a background in IR, planning and institutional effectiveness with community colleges and universities. She currently is Director of Institutional Effectiveness at Franklin University, and also serves as a Data Facilitator for several community colleges in Achieving the Dream. She lives in Columbus, OH.

Bruce E. McComb, has a background in organizational systems and continuous improvement. He is a Data Facilitator for several community colleges in Achieving the Dream, a school district in Preparing to Dream, and an evaluator for community college developmental education initiative. He lives in Columbus, OH.

News Bytes



Survive and Thrive in the Budget Cuts— a few ideas for kicks!

Article by:

Jing Luan, Ph.D. is Vice Chancellor of Educational Services and Planning at the San Mateo County Community College District with an annual enrollment of 45,000. He coordinates overall development and implementation of the instructional and student support programs of the three colleges in the district: Cañada, College of San Mateo, and Skyline in addition to the areas of research, accreditation, strategic planning, workforce and economic development, and educational technology.

Abstract:

Despite the historical fiscal crisis faced by California community colleges, we should maintain a positive attitude and deploy strategies not just to survive the crisis, but to thrive in it. Some ideas mentioned in the article include Tell Our Story, Focus on Student Needs, Energize Student Services, Seek Local Revenue, Marketing, Negotiate Service Contracts, and continuing with Planning at all levels.

http://www.ijournalccc.com/articles/issue_24/luan.html

Connecting Students to Aid

Community college students, though more likely to be eligible for aid, are less likely to apply for it than peers at four-year institutions, report says...

<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/05/20/collegeboard>

AIR Foundations Institute

[Registration](#) is now open for the 2010 Foundations I Institute in Cleveland, Ohio July 13 – 17. Within the next week, you should receive a brochure from the Association about the Institute. Please share it with your colleagues and encourage them to take advantage of this valuable training opportunity.

Foundations I Institute: The Practice of Institutional Research is specifically designed for new professionals in the field of institutional research (IR). *The Institute provides a broad overview of IR in postsecondary education along with hands-on practice of core IR skills.*

Early Bird Discount Extended - Register by May 31 to save \$50 off regular registration.

Led by instructors who have been selected for their practical knowledge and expertise, the five-day, face-to-face Institute allows participants to customize their training schedule by selecting three of the five [modules](#) offered, in addition to the required Overview module. Content areas covered include statistics for IR, survey design and administration, data management, and use of national data sets, among other topics central to the field.

Visit www.airweb.org/2010Foundations1 for information on Institute modules, faculty, and the agenda. ***The Institute is limited to 130 participants and fills quickly, so register today.***

Answer to Trivia:

KETCHUP, After making several gallons of the stuff, they soon realized it would not sell...