

The Association for Institutional Research: The First 50 Years

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FOREWORD

It is with pleasure and a sense of accomplishment that we present *The Association for Institutional Research: The First 50 Years* to the Association for Institutional Research. In this volume, we present the outcomes of two years of effort in a project that has taught us a great deal about the people and circumstances that built the foundation of who we are today, as a professional association and as a profession. Many of our institutional research colleagues provided significant assistance, and we are indebted to them. This project has given us an opportunity to look into our past, giving us a greater understanding of where we began and broader insights about where we might be tomorrow. We are grateful for the opportunity to make this contribution to the Association for Institutional Research and the profession of institutional research.

Gary Rice, Project Director

Mary Ann Coughlin

William "Bill" Lasher

Richard "Rich" Howard

Dawn Geronimo Terkla

Margaret "Peggye" Cohen

Fred Lilibridge

Meihua Zhai

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Gary Rice

University of Alaska Anchorage

Project Overview

This volume reflects the work of a number of institutional research (IR) professionals and Association of Institutional Research (AIR or Association) members who accepted the challenge to document the history of the Association. The genesis of the project occurred in the spring of 2009, when AIR Executive Director Randy Swing agreed to provide support by providing access to the Association's electronic records. Initially, the project had several goals. The first was to construct and electronically document AIR's history and evolution through governance, policies, and member participation/contributions over the past 50 years. A second goal was to document the evolution of the profession of institutional research within the context of higher education trends and benchmarks. A third goal was to document the establishment and history of the Association for Institutional Research from the perspective of its leaders during its first 50 years. A fourth goal was to incorporate individual members' recollections and perceptions of the Association's impact on them professionally and personally. Finally, our intent was to provide the Association with a flexible framework to electronically record and track its future.

Five questions were developed by the project team to guide the work of the project:

- What changes have occurred in AIR member and institutional composition trends over the past 50 years?
- What has been the scope of members' active involvement with AIR over the years?
- What has been the relationship between changes in both higher education and the IR profession as compared to changes in the AIR organization over the years?
- How do the duties, training, information production support tools, requirements, and expectations placed on the IR offices of today compare with those of the past?

- What does the immediate future appear to hold for the IR profession and AIR's role to support its members?

As detailed below, the initial notion was to document the history of the Association by digitizing the records of the Association and building a database that could be analyzed from several different perspectives to create AIR's story over the past 50 years. The second priority was to document the creation and evolution of the profession of institutional research within the context of higher education (primarily in North America) through an extensive literature review. Third, we tracked the Association's history from its beginnings in 1965 to 2010 through the perspectives and memories of AIR's past leaders. Fourth, all active members were surveyed about their involvement in the Association and asked about the impact that affiliation with the Association has had on their careers. Responses to this survey were not adequate to provide reliable information and, as such, the results of this effort are not presented in this volume. This monograph and the databases that have been created document the accomplishment of the final goal of creating a methodology and template for capturing Association data in the future.

Project Methodology

The origins of this project were the results of conversations initiated by Gary Rice with different members of the Association. From these conversations, it was evident that widespread support existed for documenting the history of the Association, and Randy Swing was approached about the AIR Central Office's support of the project. Randy indicated that he was conceptually supportive of the project and that Gary could have access to the Association's historical databases. At this point, a task force was formed to design and operationalize the history project. Selection of task force members was based on several criteria that included (a) an active history with the Association; (b) knowledge of higher education and its history, data management, and analysis skills; and, (c) a willingness to commit to a long-term project.

On a personal level, Gary considered this opportunity to work on a significant project for the Association a way to reinvest in an organization from which he had gained so much and to which he had given so much throughout his career. When called, all prospective members accepted Gary's invitation to serve, and the task force was formed. Task force members agreed to contribute to multiple activities, and most accepted leadership responsibilities for specific facets of the project. Once the project got underway, additional people were recruited to support specific activities. Below, the task force members are listed followed by the specific activities and responsibilities they assumed.

Task Force Members and Affiliation

The task force members:

Gary Rice: Project Director, University of Alaska Anchorage

Mary Ann Coughlin, Springfield College

Margaret Peggys Cohen, George Washington University, Emeritus

Richard Howard, Consultant

Fred Lillibridge, Dona Ana Community College

William Lasher, University of Texas Austin, Emeritus

Dawn Geronimo Terkla, Tufts University

Meihua Zhai, National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration

Initial Assignments

The following list documents the initial assignments of the task force members.

Higher Education/Institutional Research History and Evolution

Assignment Leader: Bill Lasher

Primary Support: Rich Howard, Donald Reichard

AIR History-Governance, Policies, Services—Past Presidents' Perspectives

Assignment Leader: Richard Howard

Primary Support: Bill Lasher, Don Reichard, Dawn Geronimo Terkla, Fred Lillibridge, and Mary Sapp

Member Recollections/Perceptions of AIR Impact

Assignment Leader: Dawn Geronimo Terkla

Primary Support: Margaret Peggys Cohen, Meihua Zhai

AIR History—Member Involvement Perspective

Assignment Leader: Gary Rice

Primary Support: Mary Ann Coughlin

Archive Database, Digitizing Hard Copy, and Future Electronic Tracking

Assignment Leader: Mary Ann Coughlin

Primary Support: Gary Rice, Fred Lillibridge

What Have We Done?

Finding the Data

Acting as a “central clearinghouse,” Gary Rice contacted all members of AIR asking for their assistance in collecting information about the Association. Members were asked to search their files for documents (paper or electronic) for Association documents and publications and, if willing, to send them to Gary. This call resulted in a flood of documents being sent to the “clearinghouse” and constituted the foundational data to be used for tracking member participation and contributions to the Association over time. These data sources included membership directories, annual reports, AIR fact books, Forum program books and proceedings, various AIR publications, AIR Business Meeting minutes, member surveys, and write-ups of personal interviews.

The volume of hard copy and electronic data sources that were uncovered exceeded expectation and was a direct result of significant help from a number of individuals. These individuals included Cliff Adelman, Mary Sapp, Dorothy Cheagle, Bernie Sheehan, Gail Fishman, Alan Sturtz, Norm Gravelle, Dawn Geronimo Terkla, Erin Maggard, Mike Valiga, Gerry McLaughlin, Meihua Zhai, Gary Rice, and Nicole Zimmerer. In each case, these members indicated that their contributions should be considered donations to the Association’s archives. This list does not include a number of individuals who were interviewed or responded to the project survey. Their contributions are equally significant. To all who contributed their knowledge, source data, and “sweat equity,” we and AIR owe a large debt of gratitude. Their contributions, literally, were essential in documenting and as such “saving” the Association’s history.

As might be expected, over time, the documents reflected the work of different individuals and priorities, enhanced software capabilities, and the needs of the Executive Committee. Hard-copy data formats changed from year to year. Often in viewing early membership directories, the same individual’s name was formatted differently with varying title abbreviations. In the early years, no common individual AIR member number was assigned. Another complication found in the membership directory was the manner in which institutional affiliation was abbreviated, as the structure for abbreviations was often inconsistent from year to year. Forum programs were another major source of data that presented their own set of complications. Individuals listed in the published Forum programs as presenters may or may not have been AIR members or, in some cases, individuals may not even have attended the Forum because they simply may have contributed to the paper.

As most of the data sources were in hard copy form, the first major step was to digitize the data, and this process was a huge manual effort. The best illustration of this effort was documenting Forum participation. To capture each member’s active involvement in the

Forum as a presenter, moderator, plenary speaker, Special Interest Group (SIG) organizer, poster presenter, etc., it was necessary for one person to manually code the data from each of the 50 Forum programs into a database.

Another major hurdle was encountered when attempting to digitize the membership directories over the years. Building electronic databases from the hard-copy directories proved challenging, and in several instances, earlier directories were so illegible they had to be manually keyed. Once scanned, the resulting database had to be converted into a format that would lend itself to analysis. In addition, each record had to be reviewed to ensure that all information was present, institutional and demographic codes were updated to be consistent, and a permanent ID was assigned to those members who did not have one. This process proved so time-consuming that, to date, only four of the directories scanned have been converted into clean useable databases.

What Have We Found to Date?

In the remaining chapters of this volume, we answer this question from several different perspectives.

Chapter 2: The History of Institutional Research and Its Role in American Higher Education Over the Past 50 Years

In this chapter, significant benchmarks in the history of higher education (primarily U.S. higher education) and the parallel growth of IR as a profession are presented and discussed. This then serves as a context for examining the growth and evolution of AIR. The information was obtained from Bill Lasher's own extensive knowledge of this area combined with an extensive literature review he and Don Reichard developed.

Chapter 3: AIR History-Governance, Policies, and Services—Perspectives of Past Presidents

In this chapter, the growth and evolution of AIR from 1965–2010 is examined from the perspective of the Association's past presidents. Each supporting member of Rich Howard's task group is a past president of AIR. With the exception of Rich Howard, each of these AIR leaders interviewed past presidents from the decade in which they served as president (Rich Howard, 1965–79; Don Reichard, 1980–89; Mary Sapp, 1990–99; Dawn Terkla, 2000–08; and Fred Lillibridge, 2008–10). While a common outline was used to help structure the interviews, the reports of these interviews are presented as written by each of the interviewers. As such, the components of this chapter reflect not only the activities and accomplishments of the Association during the various time periods, but also the unique context in which the issues, challenges, and opportunities of that time period were addressed.



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Data and Decisions for Higher Education

We hope you enjoyed reading sample pages from this volume.

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