

Duties and Functions of Institutional Research



Introduction

The professionalization of the field of institutional research (IR) has expanded rapidly in the past 51 years of AIR's existence as the professional association for institutional researchers. In today's economy, where data and information are valued and those who assist organizations in utilizing these data and information to make informed decisions are seen as assets, the field of IR looks to continue its importance in higher education institutions, systems, and organizations. The following list of Duties & Functions of Institutional Research was developed by AIR, with input from members, to continue the process of defining the function of IR to explain and assess our work. While not all offices

of IR, or all institutional researchers, will necessarily be tasked with all the duties and functions listed, and some may be tasked with duties and functions not listed, an effective institutional research function at an institution, system, or organization will include all of these aspects.

Duties and Functions



Identify information needs

This functional area reflects the iterative process of identifying relevant stakeholders and their decision support needs. It includes anticipating questions through review of data, information, and research and policy studies, including those related to institutional, state, national, and international conversations around higher education. It also includes assisting stakeholders in developing and refining research questions.



Collect, analyze, interpret, and report data and information

This functional area reflects the technical tasks employed by institutional research to provide data, information, and analysis for decision support. It involves an understanding of the data available to answer pressing questions about student access and success and institutional operations and the process by which previously unavailable data are collected. The process of collecting and reporting required and requested data is encompassed in this area. This function also incorporates applied research methods to analyze data to provide information for decision making, including appropriate interpretation of analysis results.



Plan and evaluate

Planning may include operational, budgetary, and strategic planning in which institutional research collaborates with other units at the institution, state, or related organizations. It may also include program review, particularly for accreditation purposes. Formative and summative evaluation processes conducted at an institution use IR data and analysis for planning and decision making purposes.



Serve as stewards of data and information

This functional area highlights institutional research's role in ensuring an institution-wide data strategy. Compliance issues such as privacy and security and ethical issues such as determining what data and information should be used for various purposes, and whether interpretations are correct and appropriately used, are also critical to this area. This area also includes the contribution of IR to data quality assurance activities. IR's role in ensuring data are appropriately accessible and usable to those who need them to make decisions is inherent in this function as well.



Educate information producers, users, and consumers

This functional area encompasses the training and coaching related to the use of data, analysis, and information to inform decision making. Education can be focused on ensuring the ability to collect, access, analyze, and interpret information independently and in collaboration with other stakeholders. The function also includes a collaborative role in convening discussions related to information needs and connecting internal and external producers and users of data with one another for purposes of informing decision making. Scholarship to inform and improve data, information, and analysis for decision support is also included in this function.

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