



2021 AIR National Survey of IR Offices: IR Office Staff Roles, FTE, and Characteristics

The responsibilities and duties that constitute institutional research (IR) vary from one institution to another; however, IR and data professionals are essential to accomplish the work. In the 2021 AIR National Survey of IR Offices, we asked IR office leaders to tell us about staff roles and staff sizes, hours worked per week, and to evaluate the adequacy of their staff sizes.

Office Roles and Staff FTE

The 2021 National Survey revealed that nearly all IR offices represented in the survey data have official office leaders with titles of director of institutional research, associate provost for institutional research and effectiveness, or similar. Likewise, most IR offices have analytical staff.

However, only about one in four IR offices have roles beyond analytical staff, such as associate/assistant directors or technical, administrative, and student staff. For the purpose of this study, analytical staff are defined as employees whose primary responsibilities are analyses and reporting. Technical staff are employees whose primary responsibilities are technical tasks, such as software programming and database management.

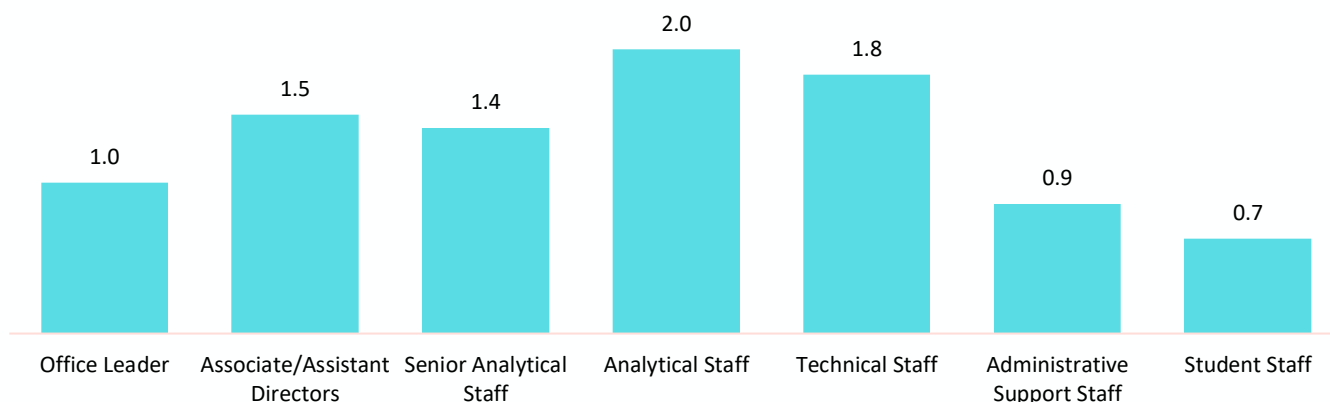
There are substantial differences in IR offices' staff roles by major sector: public 4-year, public 2-year, and private not-for-profit 4-year. While most IR offices have leaders regardless of sector, public 4-year institutions are more likely to have additional staff roles than public 2-year institutions and private not-for-profit 4-year institutions (Table 1).

Table 1. Percentage of IR Offices with Specific Staff Roles

Staff Role	All Institutions	Public 4-year	Public 2-year	Private NF 4-year
Office Leader	95%	97%	95%	95%
Associate/Assistant Directors	29%	47%	14%	26%
Senior Analytical Staff	30%	49%	26%	20%
Analytical Staff	53%	84%	51%	37%
Technical Staff	14%	24%	14%	8%
Administrative Support Staff	22%	32%	28%	12%
Student Staff	17%	21%	4%	20%

Chart 1 shows the average FTEs of specific staff roles.

Chart 1. Average FTE by Staff Role



Note: FTE = full-time equivalent.

Next, we calculated the average full-time equivalent (FTE) staff role by multiplying the percentage of IR offices with the specific role type by the average staff FTE for that role (Table 2). We found that the average IR office has a staff FTE of 3.5, ranging from a high of 5.8 FTE at public 4-year institutions to a low of 2.4 FTE at private not-for-profit 4-year institutions.

Table 2. Average FTE per IR Office

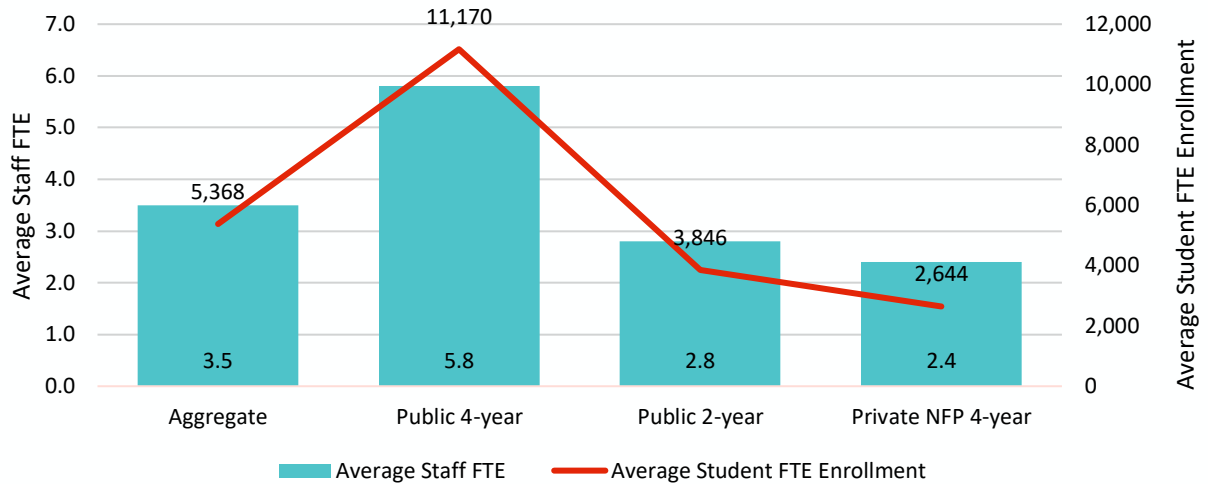
Staff Role	All Institutions	Public 4-year	Public 2-year	Private NFP 4-year
Office Leader	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.0
Associate/Assistant Directors	0.4	0.8	0.2	0.3
Senior Analytical Staff	0.4	0.8	0.4	0.3
Analytical Staff	1.0	2.2	0.8	0.5
Technical Staff	0.3	0.5	0.2	0.1
Administrative Support Staff	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.1
Student Staff	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1
TOTAL	3.5	5.8	2.8	2.4

Note: FTE = full-time equivalent.

The survey findings indicate that IR office staff FTE correlates with institutional enrollment (e.g., all enrolled degree-seeking student FTEs) for the institutions that responded to the survey. Chart 2 shows the average IR office staff FTE by sector overlaid with the average student FTE enrollment in aggregate for the three major sectors. Of the institutions that responded to the survey, public 4-year institutions have nearly triple the enrollment of public 2-year institutions, and their IR offices have about triple the

IR office staff FTE. Further, public 4-year institutions have more than quadruple the enrollment of private not-for-profit 4-year institutions and much larger IR office staffs.

Chart 2. Relationship between IR Office Staff FTE and Student FTE Enrollment



Note: FTE = full-time equivalent. Enrollment data reported from the 2019 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

Table 3 presents the average IR office staff FTE by institutional enrollment range and institutional sector. As this table confirms, institutions with smaller enrollments have smaller IR office staff sizes and institutions with larger enrollments have much larger IR office staff sizes.

Table 3. Average Staff FTE by Total Institutional Enrollment

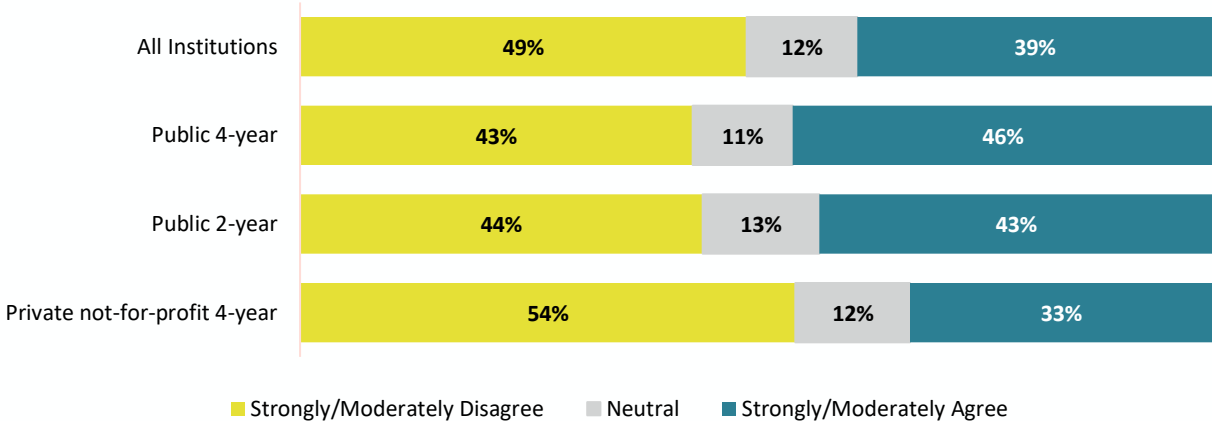
Institutional Enrollment	All Institutions	Public 4-year	Public 2-year	Private NFP 4-year
Less than 3,000 student FTE	1.9	2.4	2.1	1.8
3,000 to 4,999 student FTE	3.0	3.5	3.4	2.5
5,000 to 9,999 student FTE	3.7	4.0	3.2	3.8
10,000 to 19,999 student FTE	6.0	6.5	5.5	4.9
20,000 or more student FTE	10.5	10.9	9.5	7.9

Note: FTE = full-time equivalent.

Evaluation of Staff Size by IR Office Leader

We asked office leaders to indicate their levels of agreement with the statement, “Office staffing is adequate to meet institutional expectations.” Respondents were almost evenly split on whether they believed their office staffs were adequate to meet institutional expectations (Chart 3).

Chart 3. IR Office Leader's Evaluation of Adequate Staff Size



When asked what their staff sizes need to be to meet current demand, office leaders responded that, on average, 4.8 FTE would be ideal. Comparing that to the actual values, we find that IR offices need approximately 1 full-time and 1 part-time additional staff to meet current demands. Those additional staff are needed across all three major sectors (Table 4).

Table 4. Ideal vs. Actual Staff FTE

FTE Type	All Institutions	Public 4-year	Public 2-year	Private NFP 4-year
Ideal Staff FTE	4.8	7.3	3.9	3.7
Actual Staff FTE	3.5	5.8	2.8	2.4
Difference	1.3	1.5	1.1	1.3

Changes in Staff FTE from 2015 to 2021

Of the 520 IR offices that are included in these analyses, 176 provided staff FTE data for all three editions of the National Survey of IR Offices (2015, 2018, and 2021). The results in this section are based on those 176 institutions.

In aggregate, there was a gain of one-tenth (0.1) staff FTE between 2015 and 2021. However, there are large differences by sector. On average, public 4-year institutions gained 1.7 staff FTE between 2015

and 2018, then had a slight decline between 2018 and 2021 (Table 5). IR offices in the other two sectors (public 2-year and private not-for-profit 4-year) lost approximately 0.5 FTE between 2015 and 2018, then had another, smaller, decline between 2018 and 2021.

Table 5. Longitudinal Changes in Average Staff FTE by Sector

Institution Type	2021	2018	2015	Difference 2021: 2015
All Institutions	4.1	4.2	4.0	0.1
Public 4-year	6.4	6.5	4.8	1.6
Public 2-year	3.0	3.2	3.8	-0.8
Private NFP 4-year	2.7	2.8	3.4	-0.7

Demographic Profile of Office Staff

In addition to exploring staff roles and FTE, we also wanted to understand the gender and race/ethnicity profile of IR office staff. Table 6 reports the percentage of the average IR office by gender identity disaggregated by institutional sector. In aggregate, 58% of the IR office staff included in this survey, as reported by the IR office leaders, identify as female and 37% identify as male; there are some differences in those percentages by sector.

Table 6. IR Office Staff Headcount by Gender Identity

Gender Identity	All Institutions	Public 4-year	Public 2-year	Private NFP 4-year
Identify as women	57.3%	59.8%	61.2%	53.6%
Identify as men	35.7%	33.1%	35.8%	37.8%
Identify as an option not provided in the survey	3.8%	4.4%	2.1%	3.9%
Don't know/didn't disclose gender identity	2.4%	2.6%	0.0%	3.3%
Identify as agender	0.6%	0.0%	0.3%	1.2%
Identify as genderqueer or non- binary	0.3%	0.1%	0.6%	0.2%

Table 7 reports the percentage of the average IR office by race/ethnicity disaggregated by institutional sector. In aggregate, 81% of the average IR office is white, 12% are Asian, and 8% are African American or Black or Hispanic or Latino/a; there are some differences in those percentages by sector. Public 4-year institutions are slightly more diverse compared to the other two sectors.

Table 7. IR Office Staff Headcount by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	All Institutions	Public 4-year	Public 2-year	Private NFP 4-year
White	68.3%	64.2%	71.4%	72.3%
Asian	9.8%	10.2%	6.3%	11.4%
African American or Black	6.5%	6.4%	8.0%	5.8%
Hispanic or Latino/a	6.3%	8.1%	4.2%	5.1%
Don't know/did not disclose ethnicity	5.5%	7.5%	4.5%	3.3%
Other/Option not given	1.6%	1.5%	2.7%	1.2%
Bi/Multiracial	1.4%	1.6%	2.1%	0.5%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.5%	0.5%	0.9%	0.2%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%

Evaluation of Staff

In the National Survey, we asked office leaders to evaluate their staff on several metrics. Overwhelmingly, office leaders view their staff as ethical, independent, and effective employees who employ good interpersonal relationship skills (Table 8). While strong overall, there is room for improvement in teamwork and serving as institutional experts in the field of data and analytics.

Table 8. Evaluation of Staff

Statement	Strongly / moderately disagree	Neutral	Strongly / moderately agree
Staff adhere to standards dictating ethical use of data	0%	1%	99%
Staff work well individually	1%	3%	97%
Staff employ good interpersonal relationship skills	2%	3%	96%
Staff work to build relationships across the institution	1%	5%	94%
Staff work effectively	1%	5%	94%
Staff effectively communicate results of their work	2%	7%	92%
Staff work efficiently	3%	6%	91%
Staff have appropriate educational background and/or training to perform their work	3%	7%	90%
Staff continually work to improve their knowledge/skills	2%	9%	89%
Staff work together as a team	1%	11%	88%
Staff serve as institutional experts in data and analytics	3%	9%	88%

Methodology

The 2021 AIR National Survey of IR Offices attempted to survey IR office leaders at more than 3,000 postsecondary degree-granting institutions. Institutions of all sectors, types of control, and sizes were included in the sample. In total, responses were collected from 1,142 institutions, and 554 of those institutions completed the survey in full. To ensure comparable results, incomplete responses are excluded from this report. In addition, responses from for-profit institutions, administrative units, international institutions, private not-for-profit 2-year institutions, and institutions in U.S. territories are excluded due to low response rates.

The findings presented in this report are based on 520 responses that represent U.S. postsecondary, degree-granting institutions at public 4-year (146 institutions), public 2-year (125 institutions), or private not-for-profit 4-year institutions (249 institutions).

Suggested Citation

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