Introduction
For this specific study, we are defining institutional research as the organizational intelligence composed of campus-wide data that provides information and analysis to support comprehensive decision making at all institutional or organizational levels (Terenzini, 1999; Howard, McLaughlin, Knight, & Associates, 2012), including accreditation, student success and retention, data consulting, and various assessment practices across the institution or organization. The research conducted for this project focused on the role of institutional research and researchers at various institutions and organizations. Additionally, the Association for Institutional Research (AIR) wanted to learn how the roles of their members aligned with the aforementioned definition selected for this particular study. The project also explored the importance that institutions place on their institutional research office and how AIR can better support members in their research, data analysis, and reporting efforts.

Method
AIR developed a 10-week initiative to learn more about the challenges and opportunities members face in their daily work. AIR undertook this study to inform future AIR activities and professional development opportunities. Members were randomly selected using our online member database. AIR staff were then assigned a list of members to contact and invite to participate in the study. Staff conducted a series of 15-20 minute structured interviews that were framed as check-in conversations to allow members to share their experiences, either working directly in institutional research or being connected in some aspect to the field of institutional research. AIR staff recorded the member’s responses on a response sheet that was consistent across all the interviews. This also allowed for the responses to be differentiated by question.

The study was conducted starting in September of 2014 with the final interview being conducted in early January of 2015. Furthermore, the time of the year may have played a role in whether the members who were contacted had the time to schedule a phone interview with AIR staff. The study was only opened for a few months and during the time of the study there were other pressing deadlines such as IPEDS reporting and internal institutional reporting.

Research Questions
AIR members were asked the primary research question which focused on their daily “lived experiences” with respect to what a day in their role looks like (e.g., planning through data collection and data analysis, student success and retention efforts, reporting efforts, etc.). The first research question AIR staff asked was, “tell me about the schedule you anticipate for your next full day of work. What meetings will you attend, what tasks and activities will you work on?” While the majority of the respondents worked directly in institutional research, the study also included members who interacted with institutional research but not necessarily directly.

This specific report solely focuses on the results of the first research question, although staff also developed a second research question that reflected their interests and catered more towards their role at AIR (e.g., How would you say your work directly influences the success of your college students?, What are your main sources for professional development?, and How
does the content featured in eAIR apply to your day-to-day work?). Overall, information was gathered around the role that institutional researchers play at their respective institution or organization, in addition to gathering information from members who were not directly in institutional research but were connected to the work either through their role or interest.

Population

Over 800 members were contacted to participate in the study from an initial 1400 members that were selected. Out of the members contacted, we had a response rate of 25.3%, which amounted to a total of 203 members participating in the study. Figure 1 shows that the study population included a representative sample of institution and organization types including public and private, 2- and 4-year institutions, in addition to non-campus/system organizations. Using Lillibridge, Jones, & Ross’s (2014) national study of IR Work Tasks, we accounted for the respondent profiles by the member’s primary role on campus. The primary roles on campus include positions such as Senior IR Officer (e.g., Vice President of Institutional Research, Director of Institutional Research, etc.), Associate/Assistant IR Officer (e.g., Associate Director of IR, Associate Professor, etc.), and Staff (e.g., Assessment Analyst, Data Analyst, Research Analyst, Statistician, etc.), which can be seen in Figure 2.

![Fig. 1 Members by Institutional Types](image)
Analysis
Using a two-step data analysis process, the interview data was categorized by the members’ major activities during a full day of work (e.g., compiling and analyzing data information, attending meetings, and writing reports). Additionally, several keywords were extracted from each of the descriptions that the members provided in an effort to gather more detailed examples of each activity. After the first round of data analysis, AIR staff reviewed the interview summaries and reported 2-3 key takeaway points of what understanding they gathered from this round of analysis. The takeaways were then combined to provide a consistent and detailed narrative of the interview data.

Results
Terenzini (1999) described the nature of institutional research and the knowledge and skills it requires. Sixteen years later, the field of institutional research is continuing to evolve through everyday tasks, reports, or meetings where institutional research voices are expected to be heard. The interview data provide important context around the role AIR members play at their respective institutions and the similarities or differences among institutions and members. While institutional researchers’ work varies greatly, the following will serve as an overview of the individuals who participated. Tasks, reports, and meetings varied by member due to the organizational structure of their institutions and offices.

Reports
Reports were often initiated by requests from government agencies, accrediting organizations, top administrators (e.g., university president, provost, deans), and institutional stakeholders. During the interview period, several members were focused on compiling data and developing reports for IPEDS and accreditation organizations such as the Southern Association of Colleges
Researchers were asked to develop reports based on student, staff, or faculty demographics that would be used to report to various institutional leaders and their state department of education. Figure 3 shows the breakdown of external versus internal reports, showing that institutional researchers spend about 60% of their time reporting to or gathering data for external constituencies, with the other 40% spent on reporting to internal constituencies directly tied to the institution. Again, it is important to note that IR offices vary in their reporting efforts, both internally and externally. For example, at one institution the IR individual may be in charge of reporting IPEDS, while at another the registrar or enrollment manager may be tasked with this activity.

One main theme that emerged from the data collected on reports was the idea of effectiveness. Many of the individuals interviewed mentioned having to show where the institution stood with respect to enrollment calculations, retention analysis, graduation rates, alumni, diversity initiatives, financial aspects (e.g., department spending, cost of tuition, grant receivables), and varying human and organizational resources.

Tasks
Members who were interviewed described various tasks aside from meetings and reports. 861 tasks were formulated from the initial first round of analysis. From the data, there seemed to be consistency among the different tasks that members were asked to do, formally and informally. The tasks consisted of analyzing data, providing assistance with accreditation, being involved in one way or another with assessments, providing data for various grants, developing a system of centralizing data warehouses, supervising various staff members, assisting in survey development, and responding to various ad hoc requests from institutional partners across campus. Many of the tasks that were described by the members connect back to the definition provided at the beginning of the report of “Institutional research being defined as the hub of comprehensive, campus-wide data that provides information and analysis to support planning, decision-making, accreditation, grant applications, student success and retention, and assessment at a variety of organizational levels while maintaining reporting requirements for
government agencies and other external organizations in a higher education setting” (Notre Dame of Maryland University Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, 2011).

Meetings
The theme that emerged from the data analysis with respect to meetings was consulting. For this specific study we define consulting as providing individuals or groups of individuals with information and direction to make the best informed decision for their respective office or institution. Several members mentioned activities or roles they were asked to serve that could constitute consulting, as per the definition provided. These activities and roles included sitting on various institutional committees and meetings (e.g., academic affairs, assessment committee, president's council, dean's council, enrollment management committee, accreditation committee, etc.) to provide data reports and make sure that the data that was being discussed was accurate. Additionally, there was a pattern for those who attended meetings of staying in meetings all day as opposed to others who may have had one or two meetings. One member said it best: "one of the challenges I face about being in meetings so much is that I don’t actually have time to conduct analysis; those who lead IR are promoted because they are good analysts and also, hopefully, good managers". This often leads to many IR directors or top office administrators not being able to refine their technical skills in the ways in which they would like.

Other Duties as Assigned
In addition to their IR responsibilities, about 9%, approximately 18 members, reported having roles on their campus related to teaching and training. Some members mentioned serving as a professor for various courses, which tended to focus on higher education, statistics, and basic math or research. Some members' primary role was as adjunct faculty with institutional research as an "other duties as assigned" task. In addition to teaching, a plethora of members reported that they provide or are involved with training for various stakeholders (e.g., faculty, staff, administrators, etc.). Many of these same members reported that they get called on to show various stakeholders how to effectively use the data they have for program improvement.

Staff Members’ Key Takeaways
During a staff meeting focused on the data analysis of the interviews, several key takeaways and areas of growth for AIR overall were discussed. One important takeaway was that several respondents said they did not see how their work relates to student success directly or indirectly. Institutional research is an aspect of higher education that allows the whole campus to function in a way that uses data to move forward in being effective. Furthermore, when asked about resources that they use to do their job better, many members did not mention AIR, perhaps because they already use AIR resources or because they focused more on local and regional resources. Centralization of information at institutions was another emerging theme. Members expressed concern with how to centralize data collection and information in ways that streamline sharing from IR offices to various institution constituents.
Conclusion
Overall, this project was an opportunity to gain insight into the work that many AIR members are doing at their respective institutions or organizations. All study participants were in some way connected to institutional research and saw the importance of it not only on a college campus but also externally with regard to making decisions. Some members mentioned that as a professional in institutional research, the Association for Institutional Research was the organization to belong to in this field. AIR serves as a resource to network with colleagues and also to learn about what is currently happening with the state of institutional research.

The results from this study seem to be consistent with previous studies that investigated the role of IR officer job descriptions and tasks. While an extensive data analysis was not conducted on the information gathered, there seemed to be similarities in the data collected for this study and the various Institutional Research (IR) Task Typologies previously formulated by Lillibridge, Jones, & Ross (2014). This data is also being used to inform the work of AIR as it prepares to develop and implement more effective ways to fully serve its members. In addition to online resources and professional development opportunities such as the AIR Forum, this information serves as a great resource and tool to inform the work that is done daily for members of AIR.

References
