27 June 2014

College Academic Senate Ad Hoc Data Committee

Final Report: 2013 – 2014

The data committee was instituted to investigate a number of perceived problems and issues associated with the gathering, packaging, interpretation, and dissemination of data at OCC and with the subsequent use of that data for decision-making.

The committee met several times and then delivered its preliminary report (see appendix below). The report was responded to by several interested college entities, which led to a follow-up meeting between representatives of these groups and the CAS Chair and one committee member. Requested specific examples of data issues were delivered at this meeting.

At this time, the committee believes that no further productive work or dialogue within the context of this ad hoc committee is possible and therefore considers its charge completed. Future committee work and discussion at senate concerning these issues need to be seriously considered and the committee believes that frank and transparent dialogue between the college's data-related agencies and the senate membership (and its constituencies) must become a vital part of the academic process.

Respectfully submitted, John Mitchell (committee chair)

Appendix 1: Preliminary Ad Hoc Data Committee Report:

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College Academic Senate Ad Hoc Data Committee:
Preliminary Report

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Contributing Committee Members: John Mitchell (Chair), Stacy Charlebois, Wendy Conway, Jeff Eichold, Vince Lamb, Daniel Lawson, Patrick O'Connor, Heidi Renton, Ed Stotts

1. The data committee has met twice, where we have established and then refined several areas of concern that in turn generate a need for action.
2. Area of Concern/Need for Action#1: The Current Status of Data at OCC: The committee identified several problems that must be optimized before OCC can become an effective data-driven institution
   a. There is too much **opacity** in both the collection and interpretation of data. This process needs to be more transparent
   b. That opacity often stems from a lack of access to **all of the raw data**; all raw data needs to be freely available and truly "raw" (not already analyzed).

c. Questions arise frequently over the **interpretation of data** (and the credentials of the interpreters): As in any academic/scientific context, the data used by OCC must be able to withstand skeptical analysis by experts (i.e., faculty).

d. Opacity often results from the **method of presentation**: "cherry picking" and "dump and run," along with executive summary-style data presentation needs to be replaced by complete reports (with raw data as appendices), and certified methods of applied analysis. There should be recognition of alternative methods of analysis when appropriate

3. Area of Concern/Need for Action #2: External Data needed at OCC: The four issues presented in #1 above need to be applied to the "external" data needs of OCC, both to data reported OUT to various agencies and to data collected externally (federal, state, extra-institutional, etc.). The committee recognizes four areas where transparency, access to raw data, expert analysis and interpretation, and thorough presentation of data are crucial:

a. "Compulsory" Data: Reported by OCC to the State, including KPIs

b. The "new" Data: Community College specific measures – for example, the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA), which the committee believes OCC should be committed to

c. Data "imported" from Benchmark Institutions and used as comparative data

d. National Data: This includes a careful analysis of which institutions (with which particular agendas and biases are generating the data and how)

4. Area of Concern/Need for Action #3: Data Internal to OCC:

a. Disciplines, Departments, Programs, and individual faculty need to be able to present requests for data (keeping in mind the not inconsiderable workload of IR) with an expectation that the request will not disappear into the event horizon of a black hole.

b. All of the hallmarks of #1 above, including access to the relevant raw data, must be in place during the internal data cycle

c. In a data-driven institution, faculty innovation and development of data-gathering and analysis should be actively encouraged (i.e., CIS faculty would like to develop survey tools for polling their students frequently)

d. During the analysis/interpretation phase, there needs to be frank, open, perhaps even adversarial (as in ANY academic, scholarly process) discussion. The offices at OCC charged with gathering and analyzing data should be open to demonstrable, logical, well-argued analyses of data by statistical and subject-area expertise from within the faculty and not, as has been the case all too often, unwilling to engage in that interpretive process.

5. Future Directions for the Committee:

a. The Data Committee asks the College Senate to engage in discussion (here and in respective Campus Senates), leading to a further charge to develop action plans to address these areas of concern

b. There are, for example, several possible roles for the committee, which are not mutually exclusive:

i. A "Watchdog" function: collecting, recording, and contextualizing "data abuses" at the college, wherein the above best practices are not engaged

ii. A "collaborative" liaison function: where the data committee helps faculty, via senate discussion, motions, and recommendations, engage with the data gathering/analysis offices of the college

iii. A "shadow" data-gathering/analysis function: here the committee would serve the senate as a tool for the gathering (where possible) of our "own" data, for alternative analysis of all available raw data, and as a clearinghouse for the proper and transparent interpretation and presentation of that data.