

Decision-Making in Higher Education: Case Studies Demonstrating the Value of Institutional Effectiveness Tools

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Abstract : Institutional Effectiveness (IE) is the purposeful integration of functions that foster student success and support institutional performance. IE is growing rapidly within higher education as it is increasingly viewed by higher education administrators as a beneficial approach for promoting data-informed decision-making in campus-wide strategic planning and execution of strategic initiatives. Specific IE tools, including, but not limited to, project management; impactful collaboration and communication; commitment to continuous quality improvement; and accountability through rigorous evaluation; are gaining momentum under the auspices of IE. This research utilizes a case study approach to examine the use of these IE tools, highlight successes of this use, and identify areas for improvement in the implementation of IE tools within higher education. The research includes three case studies: (1) improving upon academic program review processes including the assessment of student learning outcomes as a core component of program quality; (2) revising an institutional vision, mission, and core values; and (3) successfully navigating an institution-wide re-accreditation process. Several methods of data collection are embedded within the case studies, including surveys, focus groups, interviews, and document analyses. Subjects of these methods include higher education administrators, faculty, and staff. Key findings from the research include areas of success and areas for improvement in the use of IE tools associated with specific case studies as well as aggregated results across case studies. For example, the use of case management proved useful in all of the case studies, while rigorous evaluation did not uniformly provide the value-added that was expected by higher education decision-makers. The use of multiple IE tools was shown to be consistently useful in decision-making when applied with appropriate awareness of and sensitivity to core institutional culture (for example, institutional mission, local environments and communities, disciplinary distinctions, and labor relations). As IE gains a stronger foothold in higher education, leaders in higher education can make judicious use of IE tools to promote better decision-making and secure improved outcomes of strategic planning and the execution of strategic initiatives.

Keywords : accreditation, data-informed decision-making, higher education management, institutional effectiveness tools, institutional mission, program review, strategic planning

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