

## How Institutional Research Can Help Finlandia

**Institutional Research** uses data/data analytics in order to help the university faculty and staff alike to make better strategic decisions.

**Analytics** is "the use of data, statistical analysis, and explanatory and predictive models to gain insight and act on complex issues" (Association for Institutional Research)

More than ever information (data) is accelerating at an explosive rate. This is true both in the "real world" and also in Higher Ed. Like most everyone else Finlandia is sitting on a mountain of data and if we know where to look we can unearth some hidden treasures. Most data sets are just begging to be transformed into actionable change and even revenue-generating strategies. Finlandia's data can be a priceless resource, but we need your help as we work to collect and organize this data.

If we use our data appropriately we can better understand our students and even how our operations work and effect one another. This allows us to carve a path for developing new and efficient methods for improving recruiting, retention, learning outcomes and much more. That is just the tip of the spear, but in order to use this data and make it transformational we first want to connect our approach to the Institutional mission (*To be a learning community dedicated to academic excellence, spiritual growth, and service*). Finlandia is unique and no one institute is alike. We want our data needs to be directly reflective of the overall culture here at Finlandia. To be effective in this approach we need to set clear measurable goals and prioritize appropriately. In response these efforts will then lead us to more substantial use of analytics across the board. We can only do this if we first understand that our data is an asset of the institution and does not belong to individual departments.

Our data is being collected and gathered for our leadership team to be successful in their strategic planning and decision making of the institution. Our data is also intended to connect and empower our faculty, staff, students, and potential students as well. IR (Institutional Research) has a goal of creating transparency across the campus, unifying the Finlandia schools into one university with one heartbeat. When we succeed at this we will inevitably drive change, but that does not have to be scary or intimidating. Analytics and institutional research is a long term commitment. This means with the change we are open to encountering

setbacks and roadblocks but we have to understand that it is okay and we will learn from our mistakes and continue to move forward. Remember that serving our students while strengthening Finlandia is worth the effort we will all have to put in to succeed.

To get started we need to make sure all considerable data is available, shared and used appropriately. This is where the IR office really begins to play a role in this initiative. Not only will the IR office build reports, but will also make sure that the faculty, staff and students alike have the appropriate information and are equipped with the data literacy skills needed to make smart decisions. According to rpk GROUP (*higher education consulting firm*) data analytic initiatives do not only help the students to successfully achieve their goals, but also can potentially increase net revenue. This is only possible through the use of "clean data". It is up to each and every member of the Finlandia team to ensure that the data we use is accurate and organized. When analyzing data it is entirely possible to verify or reinforce discrimination and bias if knowledge and methods around the data are not clear and concise. Being responsible with our data is not an option and must always be a priority. To assist in this the IR office is here to ensure awareness, transparency and training where and when needed across campus and to individuals. When we fail to use our data effectively we jeopardize our entire institution, both in academics and financially.

The approach for Finlandia is simple. It is based off an AGILE methodology mindset. As a university we may be cautious to move forward, but that does not mean we have to stand still. Together we will move forward determined but also listening to one another, collaborating, and gathering the necessary buy-in along the way.