



5 THINGS DATA CAN DO FOR YOUR UNIVERSITY

Data, and the ability to analyze and report on it, can transform universities. But on some campuses, data tools haven't produced the expected results. So what can and can't data do for your university? And what does it take to deliver on the "big data" promise?

FIVE THINGS DATA CAN DO FOR YOUR UNIVERSITY

Data and reporting capabilities are essential for higher education as universities grapple with the challenges of changing public expectations. Increasing accountability to multiple stakeholders, uncertainty surrounding funding and ensuring that the education students receive prepares them to be future thinkers, workers and citizens add to the complexity university's face. But a data solution is simply a tool. Just as the hammer in your toolbox can't build a house by itself, no data solution will magically transform your institution on its own. Like a hammer, a data solution is a remarkably potent device, but it needs the foresight of campus leaders to be used to its full advantage.

THE BENEFITS A DATA SOLUTION CAN PROVIDE YOUR UNIVERSITY INCLUDE:

1. Improving efficiency
2. Easing accreditation and other reporting
3. Increasing data accuracy
4. Measuring impact
5. And, yes, transforming your university

In this piece we'll consider each benefit individually.

benefit 1

IMPROVING EFFICIENCY

Efficiency is a fairly humble-sounding outcome of investing in a data solution, but don't underestimate its importance. Entering data once then reporting on it from all angles is no small matter. Consider how many times people within your institution reach out to faculty and others for information—how often is this information similar to that which was requested before? Estimates based on research across hundreds of universities puts the number of requests per person between eight and 12 each year.

The administrative time spent sending out these requests and aggregating responses, in addition to the time spent by faculty and others to send the same or similar information (again) adds up fast. For example, research on the time saved when using a faculty activity reporting solution revealed that an institution with:



7

colleges



55

departments



650

faculty reviews
per year



24

ad hoc information
request about faculty
activities per year



38

promotion and
tenure cases per year

Could expect to see time savings totalling

3,498 hours

1,085

hours for
annual reporting

250

hours for
promotion and
tenure

2,163

hours for
ad hoc information
requests

Calculate
savings for a
university of
your size here.



benefit 1

IMPROVING EFFICIENCY, CONT.

“Efficiency” doesn’t have the curb appeal of “transformation.”

But if you’ve used the tool above to calculate time savings for your institution, you have a reasonable estimate of the hours your faculty and administrative team won’t spend digging for needed information, then manually aggregating and tabulating it. Consider the value of freeing your faculty and administrative staff to do the work that matters most: teaching, research and service activities. Now the importance of efficiency becomes crystal clear.



Implementing a data solution helped Purdue University create central data collection and reporting to meet its federal reporting obligations as a land-grant institution.

[Learn more ►](#)

benefit 2

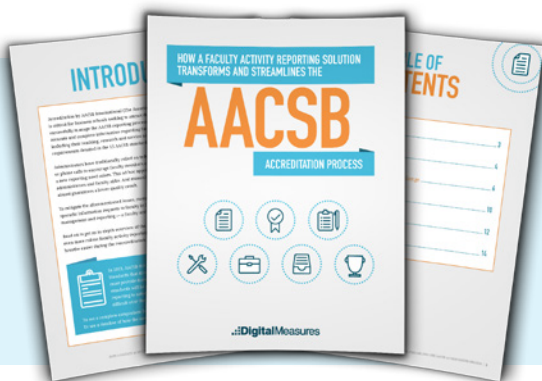
EASING ACCREDITATION AND OTHER REPORTING

Reporting requirements for many stakeholders, from professional and regional accreditors to state legislatures and federal funding sources, continue to grow in complexity. And the bar for accuracy is high, as are the stakes—consider the cost of lost funding or failing to demonstrate compliance with an accrediting body. Gathering the information needed to provide accurate and timely reporting to these stakeholders from binders, file cabinets and departmental spreadsheets is onerous, time consuming, and prone to errors and oversights.

Capturing this data in one place means it's at your fingertips when needed. The reporting capabilities of the right database will allow you to pull the same data into reports for a range of requirements without asking for information again from your department chairs or faculty. They will also ensure that calculations are made the same way year over year, so your reports are not only easier to assemble—they're also reliable.

Accreditation and other reporting from your data solution requires some work upfront. Consider what you'll need from your system to be sure you're collecting the right data that satisfies an accreditor's or funder's requirements. Then, set up the reports that turn raw data from your system into the answers that satisfy a particular stakeholder.

What does this mean from a practical perspective? Consider the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) reporting that is required of land-grant universities. NIFA supports initiatives that advance agriculture-related sciences, and look to institutions they fund to report on their research, education and extension programs.



The right data solution for higher education will have pre-built reports or the ability to build custom reports to meet your accreditation requirements. Learn how **Johns Hopkins University** and **California State University-Los Angeles** used a data solution for [Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business \(AACSB\) reporting](#).

benefit 3

INCREASING DATA ACCURACY

Assessing data quality requires multi-dimensional analysis.

THERE ARE FOUR COMMONLY ACCEPTED DIMENSIONS TO DATA QUALITY:

Completeness, or whether data needed to feed your reports is present in the system

Consistency in data collection, so all activities of a certain type are entered the same way, in a single source field and can be consistently extracted to feed any report

Currency, or how up-to-date your data is, and therefore how current your reports are that use that data

Accuracy, which depends entirely on correctly and completely entering data

Your data solution provider should be able to measure the first three criteria and guide you through improving them. But when it comes to accuracy, a data solution can provide the framework for entering data in the most useful format. The best data solutions also allow you to draw data from other systems, including those on campus and other data repositories.

The time savings here is obvious—enter a faculty member’s credentials into the human resources system on campus and the faculty activity reporting system can use that data rather than requiring each faculty member to enter it again.

The hidden benefit of drawing data from existing systems is improved accuracy. For example, importing faculty publication citations rather than asking faculty to input them ensures the citation is accurate (no typos, all contributors listed, etc.), and no citations are missing because busy faculty forgot to enter them.



FACULTY ENGAGEMENT AND DATA QUALITY GO HAND IN HAND

Learn how University of California-Merced eased the faculty data entry burden and increased data quality.

[Learn more ►](#)

benefit 4

MEASURING IMPACT

What is your institution doing, and what difference does it make for students, the university and the community? The answers go a long way to ensuring you have the information and reporting needed to satisfy stakeholders, and tell a compelling story. Let's take a look at both parts of this question:

- What is your institution doing? This question is easy to answer—once you have the data. Consider the information you need in order to demonstrate a point in your strategic plan or accreditation review, such as cultural or gender diversity. What data would help you measure and evaluate this across your institution? Make sure your solution has fields in which to capture that data.
- What difference does it make? This question is much more difficult to answer. Knowing how you want to track progress against key initiatives drives data collection needs and report requirements. This knowledge also provides meaningful information on the impact your institution has on its various constituencies. This matters both for accreditation and for reporting to funding sources that want to know what difference their money made.



Impact: Are You Making a Difference?

Discover how [North Dakota State University](#) measures and reports on the impact of faculty's teaching, research and service activities for Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation.

conclusion

DATA SOLUTION SUCCESS BEGINS WITH YOU

USU's interim provost Laurens Smith reports that the greatest advantage of faculty activity reporting is that it fosters honesty and clarity.

*“It tells an **honest** story about what’s happening in your unit,” smith said.*

“How many of us have had a department head come in and share stories about how great things are going in order to justify more funding or more faculty?”

*Now, we hit a button and see the data.
It’s a level playing field, and we can make
much more informed decisions.”*

A data tool alone won't transform a university. And data is only as good as the consideration given to what you want to learn from your data. Critical questions to ask as you implement a data solution include:

- What decisions is your institution making? What data would best inform those decisions? Consider these questions from the perspective of a variety of stakeholders so you can design the fields, screens and reports they need.
- What answers does your university require? Can you evaluate progress toward strategic goals? Can you completely and accurately report on information required by accrediting bodies and other stakeholders? Are you telling your university's story in a compelling way?

It's also important to know that with a data solution, you must walk before you run. The more you use your data solution, and the longer you're gathering data, the more useful it becomes. Knowing what to expect from your data solution at each step of implementation is vital to your success.



conclusion

DATA SOLUTION SUCCESS BEGINS WITH YOU, CONT.

A path to gathering the data needed for institutional transformation may progress like this:

- Annual faculty reviews: this requires just one year's worth of data, allowing everyone to get up to speed with entering or importing data into the system before requiring deeper reporting from the system
- Accreditation reporting: accreditors and other stakeholders generally require current information, which you have once a year or two of data is in the system, allowing complete reporting on the current state of your institution
- Faculty web profiles: the right data solution allows you to populate faculty web profiles with data from the system in real time, giving faculty motivation to keep data up-to-date
- Promotion and tenure: this requires faculty's full career of information. With data imports in place and greater familiarity with the system, you have a path to success for getting all of the data needed to fuel your university's review processes.
- Continuous improvement and program review: with a wide range of data available, you can build reports that allow you to measure the progress of a full department or college toward stated goals



Read more about successfully [implementing a data solution](#). Learn how [Kaplan University](#) uses faculty activity reporting to achieve strategic goals, and how [Baylor University](#) uses FAR software to measure mission success.

The data solution you choose is only part of what it takes to turn the statistics of your institution into actionable information. Ultimately, carefully curated data allows you to accurately report on the current state of your university, and chart a course for transformation. But as always, the transformation is up to you.

“Big Hopes, Scant Evidence: Acquiring expensive data tools does not guarantee real improvement,” Mark Salisbury, The Chronicle of Higher Education, April 9, 2017: <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Big-Hopes-Scant-Evidence/239710?cid=cp105>

Add methodology behind these calculations as well as the universities who participated in the research [here](#).

ABOUT DIGITAL MEASURES

Digital Measures focuses exclusively on web-based data management and reporting for universities. More than 250,000 faculty members at 60 percent of the largest universities in the United States and in more than 15 countries trust Activity Insight, its market-leading faculty activity reporting solution. Founded in 1999, the company is based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.