



About Vela Institute

Vela Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing access to evaluation, analytics, and data tracking to education partners to improve student and community outcomes. Established in 2017, Vela Institute accomplishes its mission through applied research, data analytics, and the use of evidence-based practices.

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Introduction

Concord University

Concord University is a public, career-focused liberal arts institution located in rural southern West Virginia. Since 1872, Concord has offered quality educational programs to one of the poorest regions of the country. With an enrollment of approximately 1,400 undergraduates and 350 graduate students, Concord has experienced a 15% enrollment decline over the past five years due in part to decline in the regional high school population, the college-going rate, and state funding for higher education. The region and state face dire economics due largely to the demise of coal production and its ancillary industries, such as the railroad. Yet the need for postsecondary education has never been greater if West Virginia is to transition from a coal economy to ensure a sustainable future.

Title III Program

The Title III program helps eligible Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) to become selfsufficient and expand their capacity to serve low-income students by providing funds to improve and strengthen the academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability of eligible institutions. Funds may be used for planning, faculty development, and establishing endowment funds. Administrative management and the development and improvement of academic programs are also supported. Other projects include joint use of instructional facilities, construction and maintenance, and student service programs designed to improve academic success. These programs include innovative, customized instruction courses designed to help retain students and move the students rapidly into core courses and through program completion, which may include remedial education and English language instruction.

Evaluation and Professional Development

Evaluation Approach

Vela Institute's approach to evaluation reflects our non-profit mission and the experience of our team to design evaluations that are actionable and useful for intended users. Vela Institute uses the Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) framework from the Center for Evidence-Based Management to evaluate programs and improve community and student outcomes.

This framework asserts that outcomes are enhanced by expanding from where information and sources are gathered and then assessing that information to utilize the most trustworthy and relevant evidence available.

Vela's Evidence-Based **Decision-Making Framework**



SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE

What research has been published to support or guide the decision- making process?

ORGANIZATIONAL INFO

What does our internal data tell us?



PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

What does your professional expertise tell you is happening and what should be done?

STAKEHOLDERS

What are the stakeholder perspectives, values, or concerns?

TECHNOLOGY

What can we learn from technology and how can we leverage it to improve our decision-making?

1. ASK

Translate the practical issue into an answerable question.

2. AQUIRE

Systematically search for and retrieve evidence from all sources.

3. APPRAISE

Critically judge the trustworthiness and relevance of the evidence collected.

4. AGGREGATE

Weigh and combine evidence from each source, generate options to consider, and selection an option to implement.

Implement the solution and incorporate evidence into the decision-making process.

6. ADVISE

Generate and communicate formative feedback from all sources and make necessary adjustments and changes.

7. ASSESS

Evaluate the outcome, the processes that lead to the decision, and reflect on what worked and what can be improved next time.

Year 2 Evaluation of Concord University Title III

To improve retention and graduation rates and thereby strengthen enrollment and fiscal viability, Concord included a suite of innovations that aligns with the mission of Concord University:



First, CU Forward will provide affordable and flexible education through online courses and degree programs.

With its mountainous terrain and difficult topography, broadband and internet access have been slow to arrive in the region due to the unprofitability for service providers. Thus, access to online education has been limited until recently.

CU Forward provides the needed structure to increase and modernize online courses to three populations of students:

- High school students to increase college readiness.
- Typical college students to increase online degree program viability.
- Adult learners who may have some college but have not completed a degree.

Online education is especially critical to increasing higher education access to rural students in Central Appalachia, who are often bound by place and constrained by work and home responsibilities.



Second, CU Forward will create a pipeline for students to engage in high-impact practices including research and internships.

These practices will keep students engaged earlier and throughout their time at Concord to increase retention and completion and ultimately move directly into a career or graduate study.



Finally, CU Forward will develop an Office of Institutional Research.

The Office of Institutional Research (OIR) will continue to report to students, the community, faculty, and staff on the efforts of the University in a transparent way.

Year 2 evaluation focused on collecting data to compare this year's work and subsequent data to previously defined objectives, identified data sources, and baseline data collected in Year 1. It was also utilized as a year to work through the EBP process in planning the OIR.

Year 2 presented challenges specifically related to personnel. University leadership worked with the U.S. Department of Education to amend the original proposal to include both a Title III Director and the position of Office of Institutional Research Director. The landscape of hiring has changed as a result of the COVID pandemic making it more difficult to find personnel willing to work 'inperson'. Finally, in July, 2022, a director was named along with a director for OIR.

Objectives

The results from year 2 show that the objectives are on track to being met, propelling the goals forward. For goal 1, objective 1.2A showed a 94% satisfaction rate of staff surveyed on professional development. Objective 1.3C also met its annual goal by 3.75% more than anticipated indicating that students served by the center are being retained more than in the past; actions that improved this number should continue to be priorities for the program.

For goal 2, objectives 2.2A (alumni partnerships) and 2.3A (student internship participation) were just at their annual goal and are on track as intended; current activities should continue. That being said, while there was no specifically defined annual goal for objective 2.3B, it dropped below the baseline measurement, indicating a decrease in students participating in undergraduate research Perhaps more focus should be placed on promoting research opportunities as well as incentives highlighted in the marketing of it towards students. Additionally, prioritizing an annual increase goal with a concrete number could enlighten university faculty on how many research positions need to open for students in order to meet this objective. For goal 3, results are still to be determined.

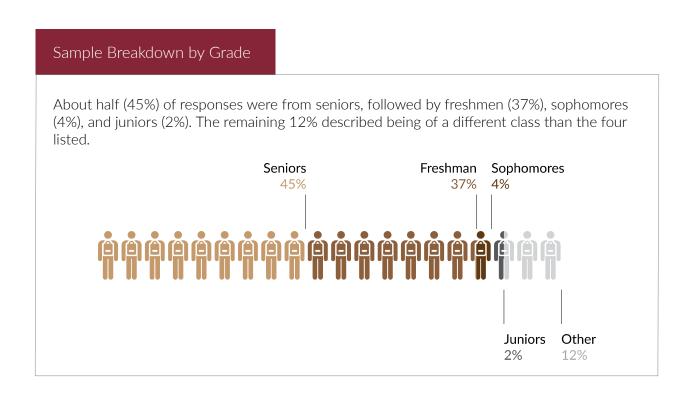
9 2 2	Goal 1: Increase affordable access to education through online courses	Baseline	Year 1	Year 2	Goal
1.2 A.	Sixty percent of all faculty teaching online will participate in professional development beyond initial QM training and 90% will report an increased competency for incorporating online coursework.	Collect Baseline	Baseline: 60 % (78 Faculty)	94%	90% (25% Annual Increase)
1.3 C.	Increase retention of students served by Center to 70%.	Collect Baseline	Baseline: 57 %	64%	70% (25% Annual Increase)
	Goal 2: Student engagement through research and internships	Baseline	Year 1	Year 2	Goal
2.2 A.	Increase number of alumni partnerships to 150.	0	24	61	150 (20% Annual Increase)
2.3 A.	Increase percentage of students participating in internships to 60%.	49%	Measured by Y2 Spring Survey via Handshake (2022)	Measured by Y3 Spring Survey via Handshake (2023)	60%
2.3 B.	Increase percentage of students participating in under-graduate research to 40%.	25%	Measured by Y2 Spring NSSE Survey (2022)	Measured by Y3 Spring Survey via Handshake (2023)	40%

	Goal 3: A robust and transparent office of Internal Research	Baseline	Year 1	Year 2	Goal
3.1 A.	Increase stakeholder views and usage of data dashboards as reported through a survey by 10% annually.	Use Survey for Baseline	Survey Built in Y1, Will be Applied in Y2 (2022)	TBD	10% Annual Increase
3.1 B.	Increase stakeholder use of data for evidence-based decision making as reported through a survey 10% annually.	Use Survey for Baseline	Survey Built in Y1, Will be Applied in Y2 (2022)	TBD	10% Annual Increase

NSSE Survey Results

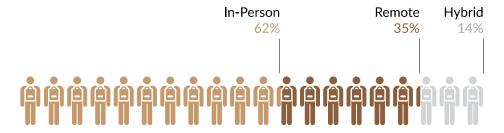
The National Survey of Student Engagement results for Concord University provide a look into the progress of goal 1 concerning online learning and goal 2 concerning high impact practices. The differences and similarities in the learning experiences of remote, hybrid, and in-person students give insight into improving and expanding online courses and degrees in the future.

The demographics of the survey were concentrated in specific groups of students but were still varied enough to provide an accurate set of data with minimal skew.



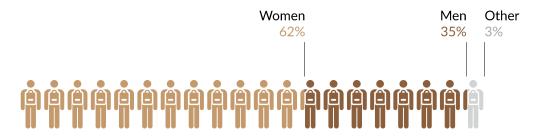
Sample Breakdown by In-Person / Remote

About 57% of students took in-person courses, 30% took remote courses, and 14% took hybrid courses.



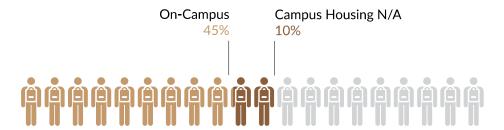
Sample Breakdown by Gender

The majority of responses were from women (62%) followed by men (35%) and other (3%).



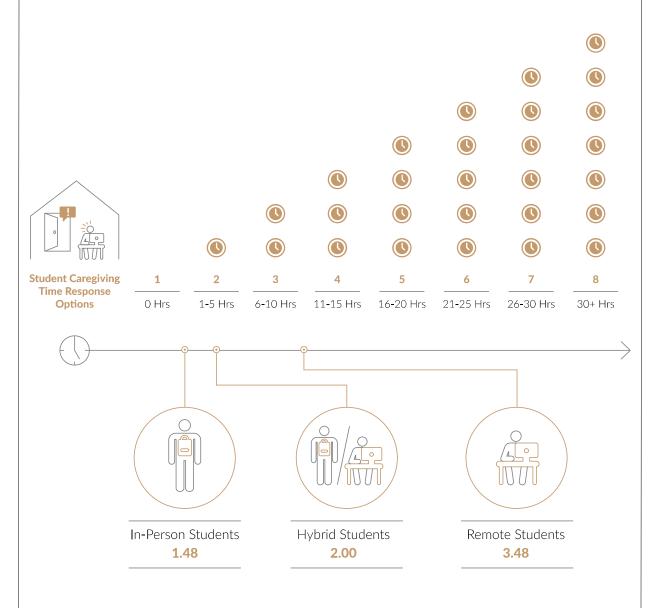
Sample Breakdown by Housing

Students living on campus comprised 45% of responses whereas only 10% came from students who replied campus housing was not applicable (with online-only degree listed as an example reason for this).



Remote students far exceeded hybrid and in-person students in stating they were providing care for another person which is the largest difference in mean out of all questions.

The response options range from 1 to 8 with 1 indicating 0 hours per week spent on providing care and 8 indicating more than 30 hours per week, with numbers in between those broken into ranges of 5 hours. Response options: 0=1, 1-5=2, 6-10=3, 11-15=4, 16-20=5, 21-25=6, 26-30=7, More than 30 (Hours per week)=8



Remote students had a mean of 3.48, hybrid had a mean of 2.00, and in-person had a mean of 1.48, with all groups heaving a median of 1. It is possible this is due to the choice to pursue an online degree being motivated by the caretaking responsibilities more than anything else, but this was not asked nor were any further inquiries made in the survey.

Most of the significant differences reported by students between remote, hybrid, and in-person courses had to do with learning. In-person and hybrid students reported a higher prevalence of classroom skills-based experiences such as participating in group work and giving presentations. Remote and hybrid students reported a higher prevalence of social/emotional learning skills including connecting learning to societal issues, including diverse perspectives, and expressing strengths and weaknesses of their own views. There was no significant difference in analysis and critical thinking skills including applying facts/theories/methods to practical problems or new solutions, analyzing an idea or experience or line of reasoning in depth, and analyzing a point of view, decision, or information source.

There were also slight differences in class time uses depending on whether a course was remote, hybrid, or in-person. Remote and hybrid classes were reported as utilizing more time doing assigned reading as well as writing clearly and effectively than in-person classes. Remote courses spent more time acquiring job- and work-based skills, followed by in-person courses and then hybrid courses, an interesting departure from patterns of hybrid remaining solidly in between remote and in-person courses or looping in with one of them. Remote courses also spent more time solving real-world problems. There were no significant differences in other portions of class time including speaking and thinking clearly/effectively, thinking analytically, working effectively with others, and understanding people of other backgrounds and demographic groups.

Student engagement varied in some areas, yet it is unknown whether for lack of access, lack of self-direction, or lack of knowledge of resources. Hybrid and in-person course students reported spending more time engaging with faculty on activities other than coursework than remote course students. In general, there was not a significant difference between students in terms of other reported engagement activities such as talking about career plans with faculty, utilizing other administrative faculty and learning support services, access to opportunities to be involved socially, and participating in high-impact activities such as internships, learning communities, research, community service, and volunteer opportunities. There was a fair amount of engagement in these activities that did not vary widely between groups, indicating there were internships and research opportunities available either remotely or in the location where online course-takers were located, perhaps those on or near campus who took online courses.

Students are reporting similarly on instruction across all types of courses. There are no significant differences in instruction styles and most students are reporting that the instruction they receive is good/excellent across all areas. Of note, students are reporting highly of instructors in the areas of giving clear explanations, good organization of courses, using examples in their instruction, providing prompt feedback, having clear expectations, and giving demonstrable learning evaluations such as tests and papers.

Office of Institutional Research

Vela Institute, through the use of the Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) framework, is facilitating the creation of the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) with a critical group of university stakeholders (including faculty and administration). During this past year, Vela Institute worked with Concord University stakeholders to co-create the roles and responsibilities for the OIR through collaborative sessions.

Representatives from Vela Institute and Concord University met to work towards the development of an Office of Institutional Research. This involved discussions and guidance towards the primary goals of OIR, including feedback from stakeholders. Together, goals were made surrounding the information and data that is intended to be tracked and utilized in analysis by the OIR for purposes of bettering the university, increasing its long-term sustainability, and expanding student offerings.

During the ASK phase of EBP. Vela and Concord identified and mapped out the questions related to the purpose and prioritization of the OIR. These efforts were made in alignment with the missions of the university in order to form a path forward and understand what needs to be understood and implemented. Questions that were identified as goals for guiding data collection/ analysis included queries around student enrollment, utilization of campus resources, long-term sustainability of university funding, university experience satisfaction among stakeholders, and post-college outcomes of students. These were formed and utilized in the ACQUIRE phase in which the prioritized aspects of CU's mission were identified, listed below.

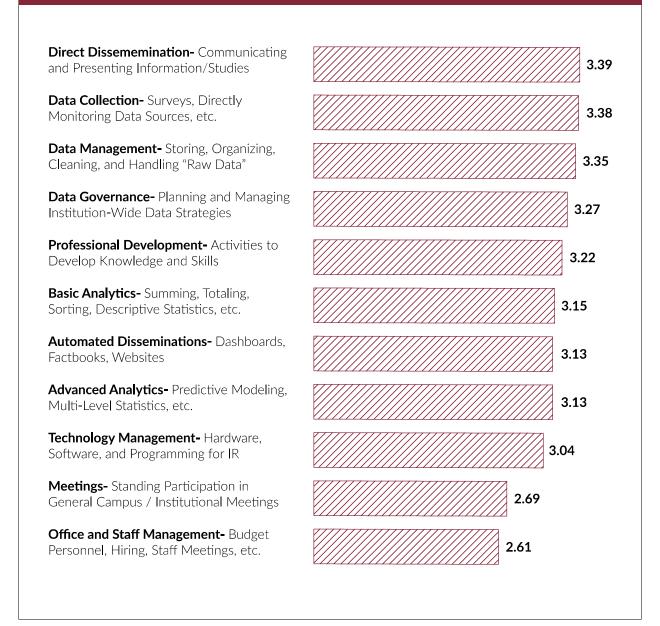
Understanding these aspects of the mission helped Vela and Concord prioritize the possibilities by impact on the mission and effort to get the desired results.

- Improve the lives of students
- Improve communities
- Prioritize innovation of teaching and learning
- Provide intellectual and creative activities
- Encourage community service and civic engagement

In the APPRAISE phase of EBP, Vela and Concord met to discuss survey results and organizational structure. The role of institutional research was summarized and likened to a coach or facilitator for the functions of the entity. It is a visionary of "change agency", a source of information but not the only source of truth, and the overseer of data and analytical tools for all operational levels. This was utilized to understand the logistical needs of the OIR including staffing, identifying a need for 2 full-time equivalent employees, identified in this instance as 2-3 staff with a mix of full-time and part-time employees.

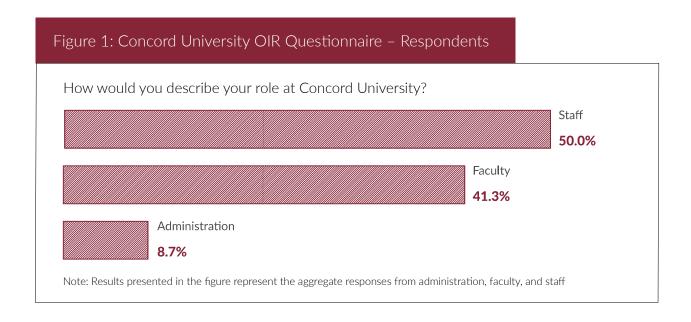
When thinking about the key aspects of the OIR and its employees' role, the need for compliance record keeping and the desire for a strategic optimization of university resources to move the institution forward and improve student outcomes was evident in the feedback collected from surveys distributed to administration, faculty, and staff. Other functions were also reported on and ranked below.

Concord University IR Office Priorities Questionaire Dashboard



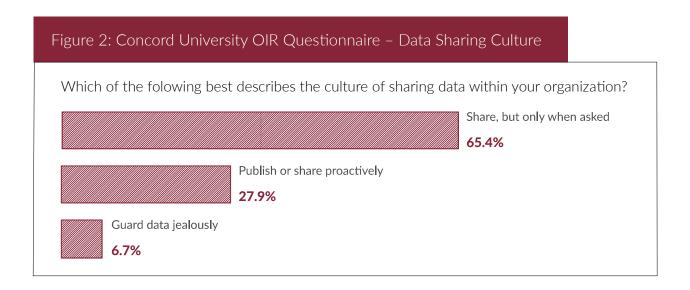
Survey Respondents

A total of 104 individuals responded to the survey with most respondents (50%) describing their role as staff.



Data Sharing Culture

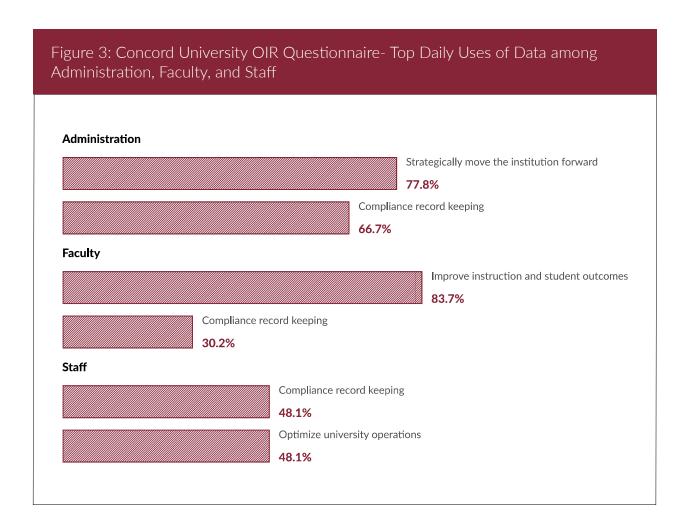
Responding to the question related to perceptions of the university's data sharing culture, most respondents (65.4%) indicate an openness to sharing data, but only when asked. However, only 53.3% of faculty responded with this view. A low proportion of respondents (6.7%) indicated that they guard data jealously with 0% of administration with this perception.



Daily Use of Data

Using data for compliance record keeping was the most common response regarding daily use of data across all roles at Concord University.

However, the primary use of data varied by role with administrators being most likely to use data to drive strategy (77.8%), faculty to use data to improve instruction and student outcomes (83.7%), and staff to both keep records (48.1%) and optimize university operations (48.1%).



Priorities of Concord University OIR

The committee tasked with developing the OIR priorities worked with Vela to first create a list of the critical projects and questions on which the new OIR could/should be working. The committee was then asked to assess: 1) the extent to which each project would help Concord University fulfill its mission by providing an 1-10 organizational impact rating; and 2) the amount of effort it would take to complete each project using a 1-10 rating.

Table 1: Committee Recommended OIR Priorities

Proposed Priority	Priority Description
1. Standard Reports	Creating standard reports to be shared with the university
2. Data Definitions	Data Definition Handbook
3. Student Success	What does a successful student look like?
4. Student Demographics	What do student demographics look like over time?
5. Financial Aid Equity	Equality and diversity of financial aid and scholarships are awarded?
6. Financial Aid and Success	Financial aid linked to student success?
7. Program Enrollment and Retention	Examine number of students in programs and program retention
8. Peer Comparison- Faculty Salary	Faculty salary compared to peer institution?
9. Peer Comparison- Graduation Rate	Six-year graduation compared to peer institution?
10. Cost Reporting	Create standard cost reports
11. Compliance Reports	Create and deliver compliance reports

Top Priorities (Top 5 for Administration, Faculty, and Staff)

- **Direct Dissemination** Communications and Presenting
- **Data Collection** Surveys, Directly Monitoring Data Sources
- Data Management Storing, Organizing, Cleaning, and Handling Raw Data
- **Data Governance** Planning and Management of Data Strategies

NOT Priorities

- Office and Staff Management Budget, Personal, Hiring, and Meeting
- **Meetings** Standing in Participation in General Campus Meetings

As part of the APPLY phase, Vela and Concord began planning implementation of the OIR. Potential staff were identified and hired. Work in this phase also included thinking about where the OIR and its staff should establish and maintain a presence on campus. The staff will be trained to work towards the identified priorities and report to the President or Provost.

Recommendations

Online Learning

- 1. Create opportunities for remote learners to participate in collaborative learning through group work and making presentations (either live or recorded) as these are skills beneficial for the workforce.
- 2. Given so many remote learners are also providing care for someone in the home, making remote learning as flexible as possible to ensure students are able to accomplish both their responsibilities in and out of the classroom (either synchronous or asynchronous formats).
- 3. It is critical to examine remote courses and their office hour availability, as well as communication channels available between students and faculty. Ensure remote learners have access to faculty in flexible time periods and are aware of such resources.

Office of Institutional Research

DATA SHARING CULTURE	
Key Results	Key Recommendations
Most respondents indicated there was a data share culture where data was either proactively shared or shared when asked.	 Build on this sharing data culture and design OIR to encourage data sharing proactively The design of OIR should include values to drive this data sharing practice and include professional development and/or tools to make this possible.

DAILY USE OF DATA	
Key Results	Key Recommendations
Data is commonly used across roles for compliance record keeping, but otherwise roles use data for different functions.	 Design the goals and functions of OIR to meet the needs of all roles across the university with the core function of compliance. The OIR should also provide resources to support using data for strategic, instructional, and operational responsibilities.

OIR PRIORITIES	
Key Results	Key Recommendations
General agreement across roles regarding the top ranked priorities for OIR, which included direct dissemination of results, data collection, data management, and data governance.	 Incorporate top priories into the design and functions of new OIR. If the OIR office focuses on a facilitator model, then both automated dissemination and professional development will need to be priories.

OIR ACTIVITY INVOLVEMENT	
Key Results	Key Recommendations
 All roles agreed that most activities should be shared by OIR and other units. The exception was of mandatory requests for data, which was seen as an OIR only function. 	 The core purpose of OIR should be to respond to external requests for data, but a range of activities should be shared with clearly documentation for which entities owns or shares the tasks. A process to determine the extent of involvement across administrative and faculty/staff roles will help clarify roles in the establishment of OIR.

Next Steps for Grant Year 3

Objectives

Continue to monitor the established performance measures and objectives to identify coursecorrections needed.

Surveys

Surveys that will be sent out next year include the faculty and staff analysis of data sharing and the role of the OIR, Alumni Survey, and Senior Survey. Data will be collected and compared to existing baseline data to track progress and determine next steps. Vela Institute will work with Concord University on a survey to evaluate usage of data dashboards.

OIR

The newly created OIR defined their role in their mission statement as "providing data to support institutional improvement and effectiveness as well as federal/state compliance". The staff have set goals and plans for the upcoming year.

The first goal extends into the future of the entity and it is "to instate the major functions of institutional research" including:

- State Reporting
- Federal Reporting
- Benchmarking
- Rankings and Guidebooks
- Data Visualization
- Data Literacy
- Data Ethics
- Developing and Utilizing Surveys
- Institutional Improvement Partnerships
- Drive Strategy
- Support the Mission of Concord University

The OIR will support functions of institutional research by supporting college-wide projects with work on financial projections, assessment, accreditation, enrollment modeling, strategic planning, and salary studies.

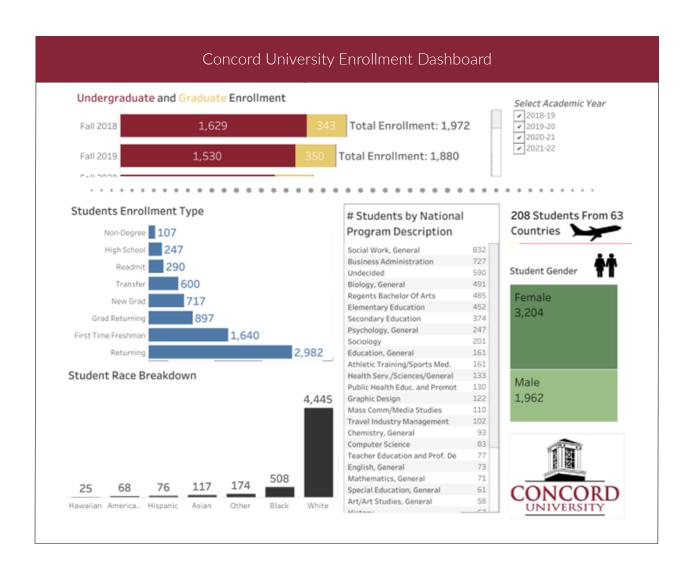
The next goal was broken down into smaller tasks to be completed within six months including:

- Creation of Calendar of Data Reporting
- Determination of Peer/Aspirant Institutions
- Creaton and Utilization of External and Internal Data Dashboards
- Creation of a Factbook
- Analysis and Use of Data Protocols (will become part of Banner Users Group)
- Data Literacy Initiatives
- Engaging in Joint efforts with IT
- Survey Auditing to Determine Institutional Survey Calendar
- Development and Organization of External Webpage and other Outreach Materials

Data Dashboards

Vela Institute will continue to work collaboratively with the OIR to create data visualizations that represent institution data. The Tableau dashboards will allow visitors to the Concord University website to view enrollment data by a variety of characteristics including race/ethnicity, in state residence, adult learner, and enrollment type. Additionally, Vela Institute will consult with Concord University on stakeholder use of dashboards.

Dashboards were created this year for visualization of Concord University data. Pictured below is the enrollment dashboard filtered for the 2021-22 school year. The dashboards can be used to track and navigate data for better understanding of university demographics and information. In the upcoming year(s), these will continue to be updated and staff will be trained to utilize these for reporting and analytics.



https://public.tableau.com/views/ConcordEnrollmentDashboard/EnrollmentDashboard?:language=en-US&publish=yes&:display_count=n&:origin=viz_share_link

Appendix

Survey for Concord University Stakeholders

Question 1: How would you describe your role at Concord University? Administration, Faculty, or Staff

Question 2: Which of these best describes how you use data day-to-day?

For record keeping and compliance To optimize university operations To gain day-to-day university efficiencies To strategically move the institution forward To improve instruction and student outcomes

Question 3: Which of the following best describes the culture of sharing data within your organization? Guard data jealously Share, but only when asked Publish or share proactively

Question 4: Please rate the extent to which each of the following should be a priority of Concord's new Office of Institutional Research on a scale of 1-5, with 1-Low Priority to 5- High Priority:

Data governance – planning and managing institution-wide data strategies	
Data collection – surveys, directly monitoring data sources, etc.	
Data management – storing, organizing, cleaning, and handling "raw data"	
Basic analytics – summing, totaling, sorting, descriptive statistics, etc.	
Advanced analytics – predictive modeling, multi-level statistics, etc.	
Direct dissemination – communicating and presenting information/studies	
Automated disseminations – dashboards, factbooks, websites	
Technology management – hardware, software, and programming for IR	
Professional development – activities to develop knowledge and skills	
Office and staff management – budget, personnel, hiring, staff meetings, etc.	
Meetings – standing participation in general campus/institutional meetings	
Other	

Question 5: What should the involvement of the Office of Institutional Research be in each of the following:

	Primary responsibility of the Office of IR	Shared responsibility with other units	No or very little responsibility	Not applicable
Accreditation – institutional				
Accreditation – specialized / program				
Alumni employment studies				
Athletic association mandated reports				
Class scheduling / demand studies				
Course evaluations				
Crime statistics reporting				
Data reporting – guide books / rankings / surveys				
Data reporting – mandatory: federal requests for data				
Data reporting – mandatory: state / district requests for data				
Data sharing with consortia				
Economic impact studies				
Enrollment – attrition / retention / graduation analyses				
Enrollment – predictions / modeling				
Factbook development or equivalent				
Faculty productivity studies				
Faculty / staff satisfaction studies				
Institutional budget / finance modeling				
Institutional strategic planning				
Institutional strategic plan – monitoring performance				
IPEDS data reporting				
Key performance indicator (KPI) development / monitoring				
Net Price Calculator				
Performance-based funding modeling and projecting				
Salary equity studies				
Space utilization studies				
Student borrowing / debt studies				
Student financial aid modeling				
Student learning outcomes assessment				
Workforce analyses (faculty / staff / administrators)				