

Culture of Learning and Assessment: How to be Data-Informed with Data Requests?

Being Data-Informed

One of our core values at SPC and Alamo Colleges District is being data-informed. Critical phrases like "data driven" decision-making and "data-informed" decision-making are commonly conflated with each other, but they are different in nature and application. Data-driven decision-making was popular in the 1990s, and it focuses on decision algorithms, heuristics, and decision rules that are meant to minimize the human factor of decision making (Webber and Zheng 2019). Data-informed decision-making is a more modern strategy in business and higher education, which focuses on leveraging data to help provide evidence for decision-making that humans themselves are doing (Webber and Zheng 2019).

At SPC, we tend to have a human-centered culture, where people matter and desire to be heard (PACE Report 2021, IPRE). Being data-informed does not take away from that focus but rather enhances our ability to make decisions in a way that will positively impact as many people as we can.

As a member of the SPC faculty or staff who does not deal with large amounts of data on a regular basis, you may be asking yourself – “How can I be data-informed? How do data impact my job?” Being data informed can range from enrollment trends for various programs on campus or productivity measures to room utilization.

IPRE can provide "big" data to help you make informed decisions using data sources from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Texas Workforce Commission, National Student Clearing House, and many other regulatory bodies. These datasets are frequently messy and complicated for many to find and use information easily. Data-informed decision-makers assume that not all data sources are available easily nor 100% accurate (Weber and Zheng 2019). IPRE is here to give you access to the cleaner data that you require to make informed decisions. We can also help you find the data sources you need and make sure data are as accurate as possible for your decision-making processes.

How do I access data?

While few people have comprehensive access to large data sources, IPRE has locations and methods that we use to get you the data you might need. The first location to visit is SPC's [Institutional Data](#) website.

Image 1: Institutional Data Website Screenshot 1

Institutional Data

Self-Declared Concentrations and Majors	+
Graduates	+
Contact Hours and Semester Credit Hours - Term	+
Post - Graduation Outcomes	+
Retention/Persistence	+
Contact Hours and Semester Credit Hours - Full Year	+
Student Profiles	+
Institutional Student Learning Outcomes	+

The [Institutional Data website](#) screenshot illustrates the most commonly used SPC data points for various academic benchmarks. For instance, IUR Reports will often require individuals to list Self-Declared Majors and Graduates for programs and the number of contact hours. These data points are available at a

click of a drop-down menu for previous terms and academic years. You can access these anytime on the IPRE website and not have to file a data request to obtain the data you need.

Other sources of information provided on the [Institutional Data](#) website include performance checks, the Assessment Quarterly, Research Briefs, Student Achievement Goals, SPOL (Strategic Planning Online), Fact Books, Data Point Newsletters, IPEDS reports, and the THECB Accountability System. The data and information are available by visiting the Institutional Data website and you do not need to file a data request form for the information accessed on the IPRE website.

Other easily accessed data come from [IPEDS reports](#). IPEDS reports include our historical financial aid, cohort persistence/graduation rates, admissions data, faculty data, and student performance. There is a two-year lag on this data source (19-20 last academic year published), but IPEDS is great for quick looks and historical trends. [THECB](#) is another excellent resource for comparing SPC to other colleges across the state regarding demographics, enrollment, and graduation rates. You do not need to file a data request form to obtain either IPEDS or THECB data.

Data Request Process

However, if you cannot find the data at any of the noted sources, IPRE can help you gain access to cleaned and well organized datasets, and you can fill out a [data request form](#). The following section explains how to submit a data request and what you have to include for us to best help you achieve your data needs.

Image 2 provides a screenshot of the [data request form](#). The first part of the data request tells IPRE who needs the data (the requestor) and how the requestor may be reached if there are any clarifying questions needed to complete your request.

We ask that you fill out the data request form because [the form](#) helps the IPRE office track work completion and productivity when finishing various projects. Please ensure to include your department name when submitting your request, as the information helps us know what academic programs or types of data you commonly use. IPRE uses this information to guide us to the correct data sources when completing requests.

When filling out the rest of the data request information, as noted in Image 3, we ask you to rank your data request priority, describe your request, and provide any additional documentation needed.

Image 2: Contact Information for Data Request Form

The screenshot shows the header for the 'Data Request Form' with the Alamo Colleges District logo and the name 'St. Philip's College'. Below the header, there is a title 'Data Request Form' and a paragraph of instructions: 'Please complete this form and submit electronically or print and submit to the Office of Planning, Research and Effectiveness. Failure to provide all requested information may result in a delay in processing your request.' A note follows: '*** Note: The Office of Planning, Research and Effectiveness produces several publications which contain data specific to SPC. Please visit our [web page](#) to determine if the information you are requesting is already available.' The form itself is titled 'CONTACT INFORMATION:' and contains the following fields: Requestor, Title, Location, Department Name, Address (with a '(If Off-Campus)' label), City, State and Zip (with a '(If Off-Campus)' label), Phone (with a '000-000-0000' label), Fax, and Email.

Image3: Data Information Section of the Data Request

REQUEST INFORMATION:

Priority :
 High Medium Low

Clearly describe your request (i.e. term, variables to include, format or results, etc.)

The IR Staff understands the need for data in a timely manner. Please allow a minimum of 2 weeks for the processing of all information requests. In cases where additional time and coordination are needed the request will be evaluated and assessed accordingly.

Note: During peak reporting times, some requests will be completed only after all institutional priorities have been addressed.

When data is needed:

Will you need this report on a regular basis?
 Yes No

If yes, how often?

How would you like for us to respond to your request?
 E-mail FAX Postal Mail (or Pony if ACCD) Phone

Attachment: (Only .doc, .docx, .pdf, .xlsx, .xls, .csv, .jpg, .jpeg or .gif files are allowed.)
 No file chosen

To prevent duplicates, click the **SUBMIT** button only once.

Frequently, individuals will provide a chart they would like filled out, a previous year’s report, or other documents that clarify their data needs. These additional resources provide IPRE context and guidance on how you would like your information presented. The IPRE office is emailed a copy of this data request with any attachments when you select “SUBMIT.”

To ensure your data report request is completed effectively and efficiently, here is a list of helpful items to include when you submit a data request form:

- Term or academic year of requested data
- A list of all student demographic data you need
- If you are looking for program-level data, provide all course codes and major codes ○ Provide as many details as possible as to how you would like your data presented (raw data, file type, charts, or graphs required)
- A detailed description of why data is needed (as it will give us more context of what kind of data we can use)

Below is a practical example of what a data request detail section could look like (This is a request purely for illustration purposes created by the IPRE office):

“I would like to request the PGR and CCR for the courses in the Baking and Pastry Arts (BKPA) department for all PSTR courses. This request should include the PGR and CCR for each course by CRN for the Spring 21 and Fall 21 semesters. Please provide the data in a table that can be filtered by term and CRN. This data is going to be utilized for a performance check for pastry arts classes during these terms. Attached is an example of a previous data table for a request like this one. I have included of CRNs that should be included below: 12345, 23456, 34567, 45678, 56789. Please send by email to....”

Conclusion

The SPC IPRE office is always looking to improve our data-informed practices. The IPRE office highly encourages you to use the [data request forms](#) for any detailed reports requiring assistance, or for larger projects in which you may not know where to find the data. The IPRE office can assist in navigating these data resources and creating datasets that are useable for your teams.

Useful Links

Here are some useful links to have on hand to gather data needed immediately:

- THECB Accountability System: <http://www.txhigheredaccountability.org/AcctPublic/>
- IPEDS Report Website: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/institutionprofile.aspx?unitId=227854>
- IPRE's SPC Institutional Data Website: <https://www.alamo.edu/spc/about-spc/collegeoffices/planning-research-and-effectiveness/institutional-data/>
- IPRE's Data Request Form: <https://spcweb.alamo.edu/PlanningResearch/DataRequest.aspx>

References

Webber, K. L., & Zheng, H. (2019). Data Analytics and the Imperatives for Data-Informed Decision Making in Higher Education. (Institute of Higher Education Research Projects Series, 2019-004).

Retrieved from: https://ihe.uga.edu/rps/2019_004

