Guiding Questions and General Tips for Working with Data for Program Reviews
Prepared by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA)
Program Review PDI – Handout

Section I: Guiding questions

The questions below are provided to guide you through the process of working with and analyzing data for your program review. The questions are also intended to help you interpret and analyze your findings and incorporate them into the self-study report.

Questions for Getting Started
- What question(s) do you need to answer with data?
- Do the data you have—or have access to—pertain to the nature of your inquiry (e.g., outcomes assessment, describing the customers served by the office or program)?
- What do you expect to find from your analyses?

Questions for Interpreting the Results
- What are the results? What are they telling you?
- What trends are you observing from your analysis?
- Are the results of the analysis surprising or unsurprising? How so?
- What possible cause(s) do you think might have led to the results?

Questions for Reporting the Results
- Which findings are most relevant and should be included in the self-study report? Which findings are ancillary and could be excluded from the report or reported in appendices?
- What format (e.g., text, tabular, graph, figure) is most appropriate for presenting the data?
- How much context will you need to provide so that your audience will understand the findings?

Section II: General tips for working with data for your program review

Data alone are not very accessible. To create information from data, data need to be made tangible. Telling a story with data is the most straightforward way to do this. Below are some suggestions for working with data for your program review:

1. **Offer a compelling narrative**. Give an account of the facts and make the connections between them clear and purposeful.
2. **Speak to your audience**. The self-study report will be read by college executives as well as people who are not intimately familiar with your program or office. Messaging should be on point, efficient, complete, and crisp.
3. **Strive for objectivity and balance**. Your insights should be based upon what the data say—not what you want them to say. Do not make over-generalizations based on the information. Do not be selective about the data you include or exclude, unless you're confident you're giving your audience the best representation of the data. At the same time, do not include the kitchen sink.
4. **Messaging is appropriate to the media.** Appropriate use of visuals is one way to enhance the message you are delivering. Whether you are using tables or graphs, check to make sure that the data can be easily interpreted.