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This poster presentation is intended to generate discussion about typical and atypical activities that IR offices and IR individuals carry out either under the direction of college administrators or at their own initiative.

Is there an outer limit to IR? An activity or function that is so "far out" that it is considered inappropriate or irrelevant for IR offices, or IR individuals, to explore, or travel toward? What is the Outer Limit at your institution for IR?

What uncertainties and pending changes – the advancing comets, the expected meteor showers (e.g., data issues, new administrators, staff changes, new reporting requirements, and new technology) – could have cataclysmic impacts on IR offices?

In the universe of IR what are the black holes (e.g., challenges in archiving paper files, resolving incomplete information in record systems, finding training for new technologies)?

Outer limits may vary with:

* Type of institution.

* Style and goals of the administrator to whom the IR office reports.

* Size, skills, and interests of the IR staff.

* IR workload for mandated reporting and required services.

* Existence of separate offices on campus for surveys, assessments, and analyses.

* IR collegiality with related resources on campus.

* Institutional or external pressures for information.

Examples of atypical or "far out" IR activities at my institution:

* Tracking state legislative bills on higher education for central administration; an IR staff member became the first director of a governmental relations office for the university.
* Serving as the university's "help desk" for BRIO extraction of student record information. An IR staff member is the campus expert on data issues involving student data fields/effective dated logic in PeopleSoft/BRIO's options for advanced joins.
* Providing historical trend information on students, faculty and programs in the early 1900's for a history professor writing a book about the university.
* Collecting information from other institutions on ethical behavior guidelines.
* Volunteering to be a conversational partner for students in the non-credit English as a Second Language (ESL) Program.
* Supporting the college's Phi Beta Kappa chapter. The IR director is secretary to the chapter, and IR staff members provide the clerical support for the chapter's business, and develop and maintain the computer program for automatic selection of undergraduates according to eligibility criteria.
* Providing personnel data for litigation when unavailable from Human Resources.
* Completing survey projects begun by other offices on campus, when their staff resign unexpectedly, and when assistance is requested by the academic unit "client."
* Supervising applied research field experiences of economics or sociology students enrolled in special topics internships.
* Measuring gross and net square footage to summarize campus physical space by function.
* Collecting positive examples of the institution serving public schools in state.
* Searching for indicators of institution's economic impact on a specific town in the state.

What are some examples of "far out" IR activities at your institution?

The Expanding Galaxy of IR

1960's:
Fact books and fact sheets
Federal government reporting requirements
National and regional organizations of IR

1970's:
Enrollment management
Institutionalization of offices of IR
Institutional functioning inventories
National ranking options
Affirmative action reporting requirements

1980's:
Strategic planning/TQM
Political environment of IR
Campus climates
Program assessment
Institutional effectiveness
Accountability indicators
Technological revolutions

1990's:
Executive information systems
Environmental scanning
Data mining
Metrics and benchmarking
Electronic fact books
Computer assisted instruction
Student outcomes/learning outcomes
Technological revolutions

2000's:
Interactive data marts on IR website
E-portfolios
Business Intelligence
Engagement—service learning, "new" public service
Web-based evaluations and surveys
Special accreditation data systems (e.g., NCAA)
Instant IR—wireless email, cell phones, PDAs
Technological revolutions

Future?