

COHORT

A Newsletter from Washington and Lee University's
Office of Institutional Research

Volume 1, No. 1

February 2007

A Letter from the Directors

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

We are happy to present the first newsletter for W&L's Office of Institutional Research! In case you aren't familiar with our office or its functions, the Office of Institutional Research (IR) at Washington and Lee "collects, analyzes, and reports accurate and consistent data on the university and its populations and programs. We provide data to members of the W&L community to facilitate decision-making and campus planning and to external sources including the federal and state government, publications and consortia." Our office reports to the Provost, and some of the things with which we have been charged include:

- providing an authoritative source of current and historical University data
- collecting data needed for responses to internal and external requests for information: IPEDS, SCHEV, HEDS, college guides, and other surveys
- reviewing University publications for consistency of information
- serving administrative and academic departments of the university by assisting in information collection, analyses, and dissemination and responding to formal and informal requests from offices and officers
- publishing Common Data Set, Fact Book, and other information requested for decision-making and assessment
- administering occasional surveys to assess expectations, outcomes and satisfaction of constituents of the University
- assisting departments and committees in developing internal surveys
- contributing to planning for academic and administrative units' self-assessment
- contributing to reaccreditation efforts (SACS, AACSB, AALS/ABA, ACS, ACEJMC)

We hope you find the information in this and future newsletters be both useful and interesting. For more information, please visit our website (ir.wlu.edu) or contact one of us.

Thanks,

Scott Dittman,
University Registrar/Director of IR

Katherine McGuire
Assistant Director of Institutional Research

Presentation on the National Survey of Student Engagement

In November 2006, the IR Office presented data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, pronounced "Nessie") to audiences of student affairs staff and faculty. The National Survey of Student Engagement, first piloted in 1999 and administered regularly since 2000, was designed to give schools a useful and direct method of evaluating how well they meet their institutional missions. The survey asks students how often they participate in activities that are indicators of their engagement with the faculty and other students, their academic program, and other out-of-class intellectual pursuits, as well as questions about students' satisfaction with various aspects of their education and the campus climate.

W&L administered this survey to all freshmen and seniors in the 2001-02 and 2004-05 school years. Some findings for our students were:

- 96% of seniors rated their entire educational experience at W&L "Good" or "Excellent"
- 93% of seniors reported working on a paper/project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources "often" or "very often"
- 92% of freshmen but only 35% of seniors reported never having written a paper of twenty pages or more
- Top three activities:
 - preparing for class
 - relaxing and socializing
 - participating in co-curricular activities

To view the PowerPoint and a summary of the discussion that followed the faculty presentation, go to: <http://ir.wlu.edu/assessment/NSSE2005.htm>

Just For Laughs

Two statisticians were travelling in an airplane from LA to New York. About an hour into the flight, the pilot announced that they had lost an engine, but "don't worry, there are three left." However, instead of 5 hours it would take 7 hours to get to New York. A little later, he announced that a second engine failed, and they still had two left, but it would take 10 hours to get to New York. Somewhat later, the pilot again came on the intercom and announced that a third engine had died. Never fear, he announced, because the plane could fly on a single engine. However, it would now take 18 hours to get to New York. At this point, one statistician turned to the other and said, "Gee, I hope we don't lose that last engine, or we'll be up here forever!"

Institutional Research's Newest Staff Member

The Office of Institutional Research is pleased to welcome its newest employee, Kristen Gould. Kristen started working at Washington and Lee in August 2006 as a part-time Administrative Assistant. She has recently been promoted to full-time status in order to meet staffing demands for the University's SACS reaffirmation process. In addition to this new duty, Kristen is responsible for updating the IR website, including the online Fact Book. She also completes surveys for college guides (including U.S. News), assists with administering student surveys, preparing the office's newsletter, and provides general clerical support for the office.

Kristen earned a B.A. degree with a major in communications (public relations/advertising) from Mary Baldwin College and has worked as a desktop publisher for the Virginia Rural Water Association in Buena Vista, VA, and as a marketing coordinator for ColonialWebb Contractors in Richmond, VA. In her spare time Kristen chases after her three year-old son, Evan, and six month-old daughter, Bridget. She is married to Les Gould, Staff Engineer for VMI's Physical Plant.

A Sampling of Fall '06 IR Office Projects:

Collegiate Learning Assessment of Freshmen Analytic Writing and Critical Thinking Skills:

http://www.cae.org/content/pro_collegiate.htm

W&L Fact Book:

<http://ir.wlu.edu/factbook/>

Cooperative Institutional Research Program's Freshman Survey:

<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/freshman.html>

National Center for Educational Statistics/ Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data Degree Completions Survey:

<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/pas/>

What is a cohort?

According to the Miriam-Webster Dictionary, a cohort is "a group of individuals having a statistical factor (as age or class membership) in common in a demographic study." For example, "all students who entered W&L as freshmen in the fall of 2006" or "all faculty and staff" are members of a particular cohort.

Summer Research Assistant (Full-Time Position)

Know a student with good problem-solving and organizational skills and/or some research experience? The Office of Institutional Research has a research-assistant opening for the summer of 2007. This position will be full-time (35 hours a week) for 11 weeks. We are looking for someone with good general clerical and computing skills, who has experience with software programs like Word and Excel. Experience with MS Access and statistical packages like SPSS is also desirable, but these may be learned on the job. Good analytical skills and the ability to solve problems and to pay attention to details are key; research-design or statistics coursework will also be helpful. The work will include some clerical and organizational duties, such as filing, data entry, and helping to maintain the large amount of data our office collects. More research-oriented tasks may include assisting in analyzing the past year's survey data and helping to compile summary reports of the results for various administrative offices.

Interested candidates may submit a résumé and an application to W&L's Human Resources office.

Institutional Research Office Staff:

Scott Dittman, IR Director and University Registrar
 Katherine McGuire, Assistant Director
 Kristen Gould, Administrative Assistant

Work Study Students:

Ken-Cheng Hsiang, '07
 Phillip Golladay, '09
 Mike Yan, '09

If you have any comments or suggestions regarding our newsletter, please e-mail Kristen Gould at kgould@wlu.edu

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