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Data-Driven Decision-Making Practices: An Exploratory Case Study of the Division of Student Affairs at South County College

Yahemn Baeza Dager

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING PRACTICES: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY
OF THE DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS AT SOUTH COUNTY COLLEGE

By

YAHMNA BAEZA DAGER

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Yahemn Baeza Dager defended this dissertation on March 30, 2023.

The members of the supervisory committee were:

Bradley Cox
Professor Directing Dissertation

George Williamson
University Representative

Kathy Guthrie
Committee Member

Shouping Hu
Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members and certifies that the dissertation has been approved in accordance with university requirements.

To my nephews – Christopher Jose and Thomas Javier

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to address the state of data driven decision practices within the Division of Student Affairs at South County College. Framed by an exploratory qualitative case study, this project conducted semi-structured interviews of directors of student affairs and a document analysis of annual reports of the seven departments that constitute the Division. This exploratory case study set out to investigate how the departments within the Division define data, the practices and use of data, and the challenges that faced when managing data. The results from this study reported that participants defined data by the source's name, platform's name or simply the name of the office from where they retrieve the data. Participants also highlighted the important role data plays in their department's ability to identify and attend to students' needs. This approach connects with the findings on how student affairs personnel use data, the use of data to make improvement in their services and operations offered to students, and to inform their supervisors, leadership, and the college community about their departments' accomplishments and advances of their goals. When addressing participants' challenges on managing data, access to data is the major challenge emphasized by participants. This challenge of accessibility to data is described in two ways: more data access for staff and colleagues; and more communication about data availability. In addition, availability of data training is another challenge identified by participants. When talking about what type of training or data literacy is needed, their perception varies upon their experience and contact with data. Accordingly, this study proposes a series of recommendations to support continuous improvement of data practices within the Division of Student Affairs. These recommendations are: enhance data processes and procedures for data access, expand data literacy training, and improve communication and collaboration among the different colleges' stakeholders.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE, PURPOSE, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Introduction

Colleges and universities are challenged by external demands to respond to the public's interest. These institutions are accountable for results that support the efficient implementation of educational policies and respond to students' needs. They also need to demonstrate the effectiveness of their internal processes, the quality of education offered to students, and the integrity of efforts made to achieving them (Schmidtlein & Berdahl, 2005). In the process of demonstrating the attainment of the educational outcomes, institutions are also responsible to show evidence of student learning, as "today, institutional demonstration of student learning outcomes is commonly viewed as part of their responsibility for public accountability and states are seeking evidence, they are meeting this challenge" (Schmidtlein & Berdahl, 2005 p. 81).

In compliance with accreditation standards, institutions participate in self-studies to examine the effectiveness of their academic and service structures and the internal processes in supporting the fulfillment of the institution's mission, achievement of student outcomes, and quality of education (Southern Association of Colleges and the Schools Commission on Colleges [SACSCOC], 2017). However, institutions struggle to engage their stakeholders in the process of using data for decision-making and improvement (Guettemberg & Mitchell, 2016).

Problem of Practice

In the recent years, the use of data to inform decisions has become a major point of emphasis for institutions and accreditation agencies (Guettemberg & Mitchell, 2016). This approach has forced higher education institutions to move away from a culture of compliance and instead to focus on a culture of improvement (Manning, 2011). For instance, the Southern Association of Colleges and the Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), one of the regional accreditation agencies that confer institutional accreditation recognized by U.S. Department of Education and the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), is requesting institutions to demonstrate the evaluation of the student outcomes and provide

evidence of improvements that enhance students' educational experiences in colleges (SACSCOC, 2017). The request of SACSCOC is also supported by the report from the Commission on the Future of Higher Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), which emphasized the importance of student learning to inform changes or improvements required for instruction and student success strategies; the Commission urged "postsecondary institutions to make a commitment to embrace new pedagogies, curricula, and technologies to improve student learning" (p. 4). This suggests the need to focus on how to measure student learning, to use these data to show evidence of the accomplishment of the institution's goal, and to use these data for decision-making and improvement. Although the use of data can reflect student needs, point out potential equity issues, and inform external constituencies about the "college's stories" (Boerner, 2015, p. 29) colleges and universities are still focusing on creating policies and procedures conducive to data-driven decision-making (DDMM) practices though it remains unclear as to whether such DDMM practices produce improvement in student outcomes (Cox et al., 2017).

Accordingly, the role of faculty and student services personnel in these processes is critical since they lead student learning assessment processes, collect data, and use assessment results to improve their teaching and learning. However, there is still little evidence on how faculty engage in these assessment practices and how they make meaningful contributions to student learning (Joughin et al., 2017). To promote faculty engagement in assessment practices in higher education institutions, Reese and Hutchings (2015) suggest that institutions should cultivate faculty voice and authority in shaping curricular and educational experiences, create mechanisms where faculty have more informal and formal spaces to engage and share their assessment results, and create mechanisms where success stories of evidence-based improvements in learning can be recognized in the institution. These practices facilitate a culture of evidence with external audiences but also stimulate a culture of improvement within the institution (Ikenberry & Kuhn, 2015).

The need for research on the use of data for improvement in academic and student services in community colleges is growing. A recent study conducted by the Institute of Higher Education Policy (Arnold et al., 2019) revealed that national, regional, and programmatic accreditation agencies in the United States do not have a formal requirement for colleges and

universities to provide evidence of the use of data to address issues of equity. As a conclusion, this report encourages accreditation organizations to make equity a higher priority by requiring college and universities to disaggregate data using demographic variables, since these data allow institutions to understand where and to what extent disparities exist among different group of students (Arnold et al., 2019). Therefore, the use of data is a challenge for institutions and stakeholders to enhance their practices and strategies by using reliable and systematic data to make informed decisions to effectively support student learning (Manning, 2011).

Purpose, Research Questions, and Study Design Overview

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore current data practices that occur at the micro-level of the institution, such as within the Division of student affairs offices, and identify opportunities for improvements. Over the last few years my institution, South County College (SCC), initiated strategic activities to produce and use data to improve student success and institutional effectiveness. It includes the creation of dynamic dashboards with student data related to enrollment, retention, and graduation, summary reports of student's satisfaction survey results, and student feedback reports. One lesson learned from these practices was that "while an institution must have the technical capacity to produce more and better data, it is more important that faculty and staff possess a willingness and ability to use such data to inform changes in policy, practice, and programs" (Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities [APLU] et al., n.d., p.2). In addition, as part of my role within the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, I have observed that it is not clear how different stakeholders at South County College are using these data in their evaluation of programs and strategies. Based on an analysis of the Annual Effectiveness Reports written by college-wide units at the institution, stakeholders describe the accomplishments of their goals or strategies using informal or anecdotal evidence to document their claims instead of using student data (e.g., student survey satisfaction results, course student learning assessment data, and student success outcomes) as support documentation (Institutional Effectiveness, 2018).

Consequently, the aim of this exploratory case study is to understand how student services personnel perceive and use data at South County College, and to uncover any challenges they face in the engagement of data-driven decision-making (DDDM) practices. In this research, data will be defined as student satisfaction data collected via survey instrument, student learning assessment results collected by faculty, and/or end-of course evaluation of student feedback provided by students that is provided by the institution and/or collected by faculty and staff to make decisions and improvements (Manning, 2011). The meaning of data will also include student success measures (graduation, retention, standardized test), input data (e.g., demographics), and process data (e.g., teaching, assessment) (Ikemoto & Marsh, 2007 as cited in Hora, et al. 2017).

This study will generate relevant information that would be used for any future development of strategies and interventions to strengthen the culture of improvement within South County College. In addition, this study will provide guidelines to improve methods of data-use at SCC.

Research Questions

The research questions that will guide this study are:

1. How does the Division of Student Affairs at SCC define data?
2. How does the Division of Student Affairs at SCC use data?
3. What challenges do student affairs personnel have in using data?

Study Design Overview

Since the use of data for improvement and data-driven decision-making (DDMM) practices is something relatively new in the world of higher education institutions (Hora et.al, 2017; Manning, 2011), as well as at my institution, there is limited research on how student services personnel, one of the institution's main actors, are using data to inform their decisions and practices. Consequently, this problem of practice will be studying the state of understanding, concern, and approach of a group of student services personnel involved in the use of data at South County College.

This exploratory case study will take a qualitative approach since the interest is to examine a complex phenomenon where little information exists and where gathering deeper information will facilitate the understanding of how institutional actors at South County College under the Division of Student Affairs define data and use student data to improve their practices at the institution. The participants of this study are a specific group of student services personnel under the Division who are responsible for collecting information and writing the annual reports for their student support services units at the institution. In most cases, these participants are directors of the non-academic units (e.g., advisement, student life, financial aid). This approach will reveal the ways in which these group of institutional actors' value and use student data.

This qualitative case study will use existing documentation, such as the Annual Effectiveness Reports (AERs), as a source of evidence and analysis on how student services personnel at the institution use student assessment data to evaluate their practices. The AERs are written by each college-wide unit to summarize the department's main accomplishments of the year and their assessment data used during the year. The AERs can reflect the type of data used by these group of institutional actors engage to support their claims, such as survey results and performance metrics. These reports are also used as one of the main documents that the institution provides to the regional accreditation organization to demonstrate the way the college measures effectiveness of the academic and non-academic areas. Since these reports are official documents for internal and external purposes at South County College, the information provided is formal. It also illustrates the data sources used for different units, the meaning and use of this data to make improvements in their areas. The researcher will examine the content of these written documents with the purpose of identifying patterns and themes related to how stakeholders support their claims and document the use of the different data sources in their writing (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

Additionally, this study will conduct interviews with student services personnel within the Division of Student Affairs to help understand the meaning and value of data of the participant individually and as a collective unit. These methods will also identify the challenges that they face in using student data in their practices and decision-making. These interviews will provide rich qualitative information regarding participants' beliefs, perspectives, motives, and

feelings on the topic (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). The researcher will use an inductive reasoning process to interpret the data by going from specific comments and observations to generate topics and to draw conclusions more general about the phenomenon studied (Leedy & Ormond, 2019). Conclusions of the study will highlight student services personnel's perceptions on the DDMM practices; and any similarities and differences found among them on how they use data supported by their cited comments and/or written documentation.

The data collected via interviews and the content analysis of the annual reports will provide the researcher some assertions on how to improve the use of student data practices and enhance activities and strategies conducive to the culture of improvement at South County College.

Study Site Overview and Feasibility

South County College (SCC) is one the largest state colleges in the United States. This institution enrolls more than 50,000 students in credit courses every fall, where more than 80% of SCC's students population are minority groups: 71% are Hispanic and 14% Black or African American (National Center of Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). There are more than 6,000 employees at South County College, where 35% work full-time at different locations across the county (South County College [SCC], 2019).

South County College is institutionally accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award associate and baccalaureate degrees. In addition to the institutional accreditation, South County College has also more than 20 programs accredited by national recognized agencies that uphold the high standards of their professions. About five years ago, as support for the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, South County College intentionally started the process of promoting a culture of evidence and improvement at the institution (South County College Strategic Planning 2015-2020, n.d.). In this effort, the college's Office of Institutional Effectiveness began implementing a model of institutional effectiveness that incorporates comprehensive resources of college-wide data and makes it available across the institution (APLU et al., n.d.). It includes student data related to

enrollment, retention, and graduation, college-wide survey results, student feedback, and special data requests made by stakeholders.

In addition, since the early 2000's, every year each college-wide unit at the college produces an Annual Effectiveness Report (AER). This annual document serves as the college-wide units' major document to provide unit's planning, assessment, and evaluation practices related to the contributions to the Strategic Plan, unit's goals, and their outcomes. Currently, there are 9 Academic Disciplines, 15 Professional Schools/programs, 18 Administrative Support, and 14 Student Support Services units that write an AER annually. Internally, each student support service area has an administrator lead who convenes assessment practices college-wide within their student service area.

To respond to the employees needs regarding student data, the Institutional Research Office and the Assessment Office under the Division of Institutional Effectiveness produce summary data by term, annually, and upon request. For instance, Institutional Research develops dynamic dashboards to provide aggregated data regarding student's demographics, enrollment, student success outcomes (passing rates, completion rates, etc.). The Office of Assessment is responsible summarizing and producing dashboards and reports regarding college-wide surveys such as Graduating Survey, Annual Alumni Survey, Enrolled Student Survey, etc. This data is posted in our internal webpages and additional data summaries are created upon request. In general standards, the data provided can be disaggregated by the demographic's variables such as gender, ethnicity, enrollment status, campus-based, and so forth.

Results from the Annual Effectiveness Reports showed that units at the college still have difficulties in providing data as support documentation of their claims, instead they use more anecdotal evidence (Institutional Effectiveness, 2018). Consequently, there is a need to explore in more detail how student support services staff use data at South County College to improve their student support practices.

This study will be feasible to carry out on a timely manner. First, the researcher will have accessibility to the data already provided by units via their annual reports. Those reports are available at the beginning of each academic year to the college community. The researcher will target the analysis of the documentation provided on the annual effectiveness reports of the past

year. Second, the researcher has access to participants for interviews. These interviews can be performed during office hours or be accommodated based on participants' schedules. This study will not be affected by COVID since the documentation is submitted online and continue be collected and interviews to participants can be scheduled virtually if conditions and guidelines are limited to social distancing protocols. The researcher already has some experience collecting and analyzing qualitative data and will utilize qualitative data analysis software to help organize, segment, code, and analyze pieces of the interview transcripts and documentation.

Significance

The review of the literature on the use of data for improvement in education showed that most articles focus on using data in K-12 schools with little focus on higher education. Few studies in higher education are centered on the importance of the data to inform instruction improvement (Guettemberg & Mitchell, 2016; Paolini, 2015; Rehak & McKinney, 2015). Other studies concentrate on course evaluations and additional evaluation tools during the course instruction (formative assessments) to inform their teaching and enhance student's experience in classroom (Borch et al., 2020; Phuong et al., 2017; Rehak & McKinney, 2015). Although these studies address some elements on how faculty are using different strategies, assessments, and data to inform decisions in their instruction, there is still a need to determine how colleges and universities use data-driven decision-making to create policies and procedures conducive to improve in student outcomes, particularly in student services units in college and universities in United States and in my local context. The limited research on the use of data for improvement in institutions of higher education confirms the significance of my problem of practice.

The findings of this study will be valuable to South County College as it will help to explore how student support personnel use data to improve their practices and promote student success, as well as to better respond to the challenges that stakeholders face in using the data for improvement. The results of this study will serve to identify ways to in which SCC can better respond to the specific student data needs that the Division of Student Affairs might have and advance college's mission of the "culture of evidence."

This study will also clarify and promote division-wide the different types of data used for institutional actors, such as student services personnel, and provide any additional information to create professional opportunities to enrich the culture of data for improvement within the college. This research study will also gather information on best practices on the use of data that allow other practitioners in the field to incorporate ways to respond to students' needs and to strengthen assessment and evaluation processes within their student affairs area.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a need to explore how student services personnel at South County College are using data to inform their practices and make decisions to benefit the diverse group of students they serve. It is also essential to consider how the use of data by South County College institutional actors will inform the college about the specific needs of students and the different strategies or actions required to improve instruction and services towards the student's success in college. As South County College joins the efforts of using data to support students' needs and guide the college's decisions towards an equitable environment for its students, these practices will also provide evidence to respond to accreditation demands and to strengthen a culture of evidence and improvement within the institution.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The use of data is crucial to higher education institutions since it provides evidence to accreditation agencies and state governments of institutions' level of effectiveness regarding academic instruction and support services to students. In these efforts, colleges and universities engage in assessment activities and data-driven decision making (DDDM) practices to respond to the demands of accountability brought by the different constituencies. Towards these ends, this chapter will first offer a general overview of the implications that the demands for accountability for quality education have on higher education institutions, and the problems that arise due to the complexity of these practices within the institutions. The second part of this chapter will present an analysis of the literature related to the use of data and data-driven decision making (DDDM) and the limited empirical research on how institutions are addressing data-decision making efforts. The analysis of the literature identifies multiple factors involved in promoting these DDDM practices in colleges and universities. At the end, considerations on the need of more empirical research are necessary to better understand institutions' internal processes and challenges encountered by one the primary institutional actors engaged in the assessment practices such as student services personnel.

Orientation within the Larger Educational Landscape

In higher education institutions, challenges for accountability started in the twenty-first century as it requires institutions to respond to the demands made by different constituencies. Accountability demands have changed over time, from monitoring dollars linked to enrollment, faculty-ratios, staff salaries, and libraries materials, to providing more information about the institution operation and results (Zumeta, 2000). These demands of colleges and universities for accountability come from the state, federal government, accreditation, regions, and employers (Ewell, 2011). Although the Federal government does not have direct control or centralized authority over higher education institutions, they have designed private, non-governmental,

accreditation organizations to insure a central level of quality to colleges and universities. Accreditation agencies are the organizations by which the federal government is holding higher education institutions accountable. In the last two decades, accreditation agencies have focused on increasing expectations on student learning, achievement, and improvement based on assessment results and practices lead in the institutions (Kinzie, 2019). For instance, The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) standard section 8 focuses on student learning and success. SACSCOC requests institutions to demonstrate that they evaluate the student outcomes and provide evidence on improvements that enhance students' educational experiences in colleges (SACSCOC, 2017).

In response for accreditation demands for accountability, higher education institutions are responsible for demonstrating the attainment of educational outcomes and to show evidence of the use of data for improvement and data-driven decision making (DDDM) practices. For instance, colleges and universities respond to accreditation standards by reviewing internal policies of how to measure institution's student outcomes and how to use data for decision-making and improvement (Manning, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Colleges and universities also engage in processes to promote within their stakeholders the culture of assessment and improvement (Guettemberg & Mitchell, 2016; Chen, 2020). The role of faculty and student services personnel in these processes is critical since they lead student learning assessment processes, collect data, and use assessments' results to improve their teaching and learning. These practices facilitate the culture of evidence as well as stimulate a culture of improvement within the institution (Ikenberry & Kuhn, 2015). However, though faculty and student services personnel engage in the collection of assessment data to measure student learning, there is not enough empirical evidence on how they are using the data to make changes and improvements in student's outcomes (Joughin et al., 2017).

Previous Studies on the use of data for improvement

The use of data in K-12

The push for data-driven decision making (DDDM) in education grew from in K-12 education and its response to demands for accountability by state and federal government. For

example, The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001 (Curry et al., 2016; Ikemoto & Marsh, 2007) encouraged schools and districts to aggregate data (e.g., tests scores, assessment) to better understand students' achievement gaps and to use data to make decisions about teaching and learning. To assess the implications of data use, the definition of data-driven decision making (DDDM) provided by Ikemoto & Marsh (2007) will be adopted for use in my study. For these researchers DDDM practices relates “to teachers, principals, and administrators systematically collecting and analyzing data to guide a range of decisions to help improve the success of students and schools” (p. 108). Studies on the use of data and data-driven decision making (DDDM) practices in K-12 have emphasized that use of data helps understand the students' experiences, needs, and focus future interventions to support students' success (Hamilton et al., 2009; Simmons, 2012). For instance, Hamilton et al. (2009) suggested the use of data to help identify students who are struggling, student's strengths, measure effectiveness of classroom strategies, and identify areas where the curriculum can be adjusted. Similarly, Simmons (2012) denoted the use of data can inform student-teacher relationships, school accountability, instructional improvement, professional development, budgeting, etc. Although these studies suggested the importance of the use of data, few of them are empirical studies on the use of data to make improvements.

Additionally, there are studies that focus on the conditions and factors that influence faculty's engagement in DDDM practices (Coburn & Turner, 2012; Curry et al., 2016; Ikemoto & Marsh, 2007; Marsh & Farrell, 2015). One of the factors shown in these studies is faculty knowledge and training on the use of data. For example, Ikemoto & Marsh (2007) found that only 23% of high schools reported feeling moderately and/or very prepared to use data; and Marsh & Farrell (2015) focused in “data literacy” training as one of the strategies to engage teachers on the meaningful use of data. Coburn & Turn (2012) and Curry et al. (2016) identified administration support and relationship between teachers and administrators as way to enhance DDDM practices within the institution that are conducive to organizational change. In addition, there are other factors that may influence the use of data in schools such as accessibility and timeliness of data; and perception about the accuracy and validity of data (Ikemoto & Marsh, 2007).

In sum, K-12 studies show the importance of DDDM practices to understand students' needs and support their success, but also reveal the need to improve teacher's knowledge and skills on the use of data.

The use of assessment data in Higher Education

Higher Education institutions embark in assessment practices for the purpose of gathering data regarding students' knowledge, skills, and experiences to demonstrate the achievement of student outcomes. These assessment practices are drawn from the outcomes-based assessment cycle of (1) identifying outcomes, (2) determining data sources, (3) collecting data, (4) and using the information and data to improve student outcomes (Bresciani, 2019; Palomba & Banta, 1999). Institutional leaders, faculty, and staff engage in this assessment cycle to make decisions and improvements. Therefore, the use of assessment data becomes one of the crucial steps in which data-driven decisions practices occurs to determine the achievement of student outcomes.

Studies show that the most common practices used by faculty in higher education institutions related to the use of assessment data include the use of course evaluations and feedback provided by students (Rehak & Mckinney, 2015; Phuong et al., 2017; Selwyn et al., 2018; Webber, 2012). For example, formative assessment practices, such as collecting feedback during the semester, promote discussion among faculty to enhance instructional practices in developmental math courses (Rehak & Mckinney, 2015). Phuong et al.'s (2017) empirical study demonstrated that the adaptative equity-oriented pedagogy, which includes the collection of formative assessment and feedback during the semester, allow faculty to adjust instruction to better serve students learning needs and promote a collaborative environment among students and instructors. Other studies highlight course evaluations, surveys, course grades, and student's progression to use data to improve teaching and learning experience in students (Borch et al., 2020; Paoli, 2015; Selwyn et al., 2018). Paoli (2015) indicated that the student's course evaluations reports are used for faculty to gather information about the effectiveness of the instruction as well as the degree in what students demonstrate satisfaction with meeting the learning objectives. Likewise, Borch et al. (2020) used course evaluation survey and a dialogue-based evaluation method as two different initiatives led by faculty that support the improvement on learning and the quality of education in a Norwegian university. The results of

the study showed that students considered the dialogue-based method more appealing to them since they can provide feedback immediately to faculty and enhance dialogues about their learning process.

Even though the studies above touch on assessments practices as a critical issue in higher education institutions, there are few studies and research that shows how faculty uses assessment data to make changes or decision upon their assessment results (Joughin et al., 2017). There is still not enough empirical evidence on what and how assessment data is used by faculty and student services personnel in higher education. For instance, Cox et al., (2017) study showed evidence that 57 schools' participants in their study start embracing assessment practices within the institution; however, only half of the institutions reported that they are using assessment results to make decisions about personnel, courses, or programs.

Challenges in the use of data

Research also notes a variety of the challenges that faculty and staff face when engaging in the use of data practices for improvement in colleges and universities. Some challenges are related to data accessibility, expertise of data use, and perceptions that data is not useful (Brower et al., 2020; Hora et al., 2017; Reese & Hutching, 2015). For instance, there is a perception that instructors and administrators do not have the knowledge and training on how to use data (Brower et al., 2020). Reese & Hutching (2015) found that faculty challenges range from little expertise in conducting assessments, to lack of time to do assessments and the lack of engagement or interest in pursuing these activities and in making improvements when they discover that something is not working. Goomas & Isbell (2015) found that different perceptions about the meaning and use of data between administrators and staff members within the institution can become a barrier for meaningful improvements in teaching and learning. Other studies, such as Hora et al. (2017), reported similar factors found in K-12 education, where faculty had limited knowledge in managing educational research and data, as well as limited time to engage in DDDM practices in their institutions as challenges that faculty face when engaged in the use of data.

The role of Leadership and institution's culture in the Data-Driven Decision Making (DDDM) practices in Higher Education

Although data-driven decision making (DDDM) practices are performed mainly by faculty and staff in colleges and universities, it is the leadership—senior administrators, VPs of academics, student affairs, and presidents—which plays an important role in the implementation of these practices on campuses. Some studies show that the level of education and literacy that leaders have regarding DDDM can influence how these practices occur within the institution (Chen, 2020; DeJear, et al., 2018). For instance, DeJear et al. (2018) found that leaders with higher credentials have higher expectations regarding effective DDDM practices in their institutions. Similarly, according to Chen (2020), leaders' competencies, such as advocacy skills and organizational strategy skills, can impact their level of DDDM literacy on how they approach people involved, processes, and the governance of DDDM practices in their campuses. Additionally, leaders' longevity has an impact on their level of DDDM literacy as leaders with experience demonstrated high levels of data-driven decision-making knowledge (Chen, 2020). As result of it, DeJear et al. (2018) findings suggest that leaders can determine the path of DDDM practices. This assumption is supported by other studies such as Brower et al., 2020 and Guetterman & Mitchell, 2016. For instance, when administrators' perceptions vary regarding the use of the data and they are the ones that determine the direction, vision, these perceptions can lead the efforts towards hindering a culture of evidence and improvement within the institution (Guetterman & Mitchell, 2016). In other words, college and university leaders set a tone for the use of data and the values of DDDM practices on campuses than can facilitate or impede the implementation of it. In sum, the leadership knowledge, skills, and perceptions regarding the use of the data improvement become an indicator of how assessment activities and data-driven decision practices will be executed at the institution and will guide faculty and administrator's perception and awareness of these practices.

Furthermore, there are other studies that focus on the role of policies, and organization's culture as agents to facilitate or impede the implementation of DDDM inside college and universities. As a result, stakeholders are influenced by the norms and values that institution must promote data-driven decision making (DDDM) activities. In this line, institutions' culture,

and policies also play an important role in the promotion of assessment practices that include the use of results for improvement and DDDM practices (Brower et al., 2020; Cox et al., 2017; Goomas & Isbell, 2015; Guetterman & Mitchell, 2016; Kezar & Ekell, 2002). For instance, Kezar & Ekell (2002) suggested the need to focus on the culture of the institution to understand the system of rules, norms that produce change and/or facilitate the implementation of strategies within the institutions. The results of their study found a relationship between institutional culture and change. Therefore, strategies that are implemented in an institution should be successful if there are aligned to the culture of the institution. Moreover, institutional leaders are successful when they understand the cultures in which they are working. These findings are also supported and used by Gutterman & Mitchel (2016) who approached the impact of institutional culture in the process of improving assessment practices. In this study the focus was to understand how faculty perceives if the characteristics of their organizations as a system of values, mission, and underlying assumptions will be more adequate to identify ways to support assessment practices at their institution. Results demonstrated the importance of an institution's culture and policies, as well as the role of faculty, in the process of promoting assessment processes within the organization culture. Little (2015) suggested that to better understand how universities can improve the quality of teaching, it is necessary to understand universities as organizations, with systems of rules, norms.

Other studies approached DDDM practices from the perspective of building a culture of evidence within the institution (DeJear et al., 2018; Goomas & Isbell, 2015). Goomas & Isbell (2015) and DeJear et al. (2018) proposed the need to build a culture of evidence that suggests the use of data to understand better where students are experiencing problems, either in the academic environment and/or in the academic and support services received from the college. For instance, Goomas & Isbell (2015) indicated the role of Institutional Research (IR) office as critical in supporting the culture of evidence and improvement in the institution. IR offices should be proactive in improving processes, data collection, and analysis in support of student engagement and success in the classroom.

A more specific illustration of organizational culture and DDDM practices is the study of Brower et al. (2020). This study focused on the understanding of how processes of data sharing

occur among different members of the institutions in Florida. Part of their findings indicated that Florida College system institutions vary in the way that data is shared among the different members (stakeholders) in the institution. This is influenced by the institutional culture of each institution. Institutions with more “democratic culture” of sharing demonstrated better use of the data across different members of institutions. Contrary, institutions with "need to know" data cultures were limited with the data collected as well as employees using the data (Brower et al., 2020). Although this study limited “data culture” to the availability to the share process, and how frequent and what form data is shared, the study is an indication that the use of data can be impacted by these indicators and support the need to continue investigating, from a qualitative perspective, how institutional culture impact the use of data, as well as how processes of using data occur in colleges at Florida, specifically at South County College.

According with the literature reviewed most studies regarding the use of data for improvement are found in K-12 education. And, while there is research that focuses on faculty interaction with only one type of data for improvement, class evaluations, most studies are quantitative and lack the detail information and voice of the students’ services personnel regarding their perceptions on the use of data and the challenges that they encounter on accessing and using the data for decision making and improvement.

Description of the Local Context

South County College (SCC) is one of the largest of the 28 state colleges in the Florida College System and serves more than 80,000 credit students annually (SCC, 2020). The college is a multi-campus institution composed by eight campuses and one location across the County. In the student affairs’ operations, the division is led by a Vice Provost of Student Affairs, who work collaboratively with the seven Student’s Deans and Student Services units in Campuses. Therefore, the Division of Student Affairs (DSA) has a singular structure of operations with seven departments in each of the eight SCC campuses.

The Division of Student Affairs includes the following departments: ACCESS (A Comprehensive Center for Exceptional Student Services), Admissions and Registration, Advisement and Career Services, International Students, Recruitment Services, Student Life, and

Testing and Assessment. Each department has an administrative lead in each of the campus and every two years one of the administrative leads becomes a college-wide administrative lead who facilitates and convenes the college-wide goals and assessment processes of their department.

The division engages in assessment practices to measure the effectiveness of the services provided to students, as well as use the data to make decisions and improvements. The division's operational characteristics described earlier support the use of a qualitative case study as the internal dynamics of the seven departments are the unit of analysis on how the engagement of DDDM practices can reflect and help to understand how the use of assessment data occur within the division. These practices are described annually via the Annual Effectiveness Reports (AER). Section 4 of the Annual Effectiveness Report (AER) relates to the outcome assessment practices and the use of assessment results for improvement.

To support the cycle of continuous improvement at the institution, the Division of Institutional Effectiveness engages the college community in the planning and assessing processes of all academic and non-academic areas at the institution. Ultimately, the goal of engaging college stakeholders in data driven decision making practices is to produce better student outcomes at the college. In these efforts, the Institutional Research (IR) Office and the Assessment Office, produce summary data by term, annually, and upon request to provide resources to respond to the employees' needs regarding student data.

For instance, the IR office makes available different types of dashboards using Power BI and Tableau to display institutional data related to enrollment activities and academic measures, such as retention, completion, and grade distribution. In addition, for enrollment management purposes, IR created specific data files with students' level information that can be exported by the college community to mainly support reach out enrollment strategies. The information available from IR is restricted to college's leadership and to an intended group of academic and student services personnel which includes department chairs, campus' data liaisons, and certain academic and student services directors and staff.

To provide summaries of qualitative data, the Assessment office produces dashboards and reports regarding student survey data. This data offers information about student experiences and satisfaction during their college years. Survey data available is gathered from our current

enrolled students, graduates, and alumnus. This data also addresses some specific purposes, such as gathering information about student's perception on college-wide initiatives and new practices. All these reports are posted in the college's internal webpages (e.g., Microsoft SharePoint) for all college employees. Additional data summaries are created upon request. In general standards, the IR data and survey data provided can be disaggregated by the demographic's variables such: gender, ethnicity, enrollment status, campus-based, and so forth.

Although these planning and assessment data processes are in place at SCC, the analysis of Section 4 made by Division of Institutional Effectiveness still shows areas of improvement since the description provided by the college-wide departments on what data collection method was used and how results are used by the stakeholders is vague with not enough information that determines data driven decision making practices occur within the units.

Summary and Contributions

The literature review provides an overview of the different factors that facilitate or hinder the use of assessment results and data-driven decision making in colleges and universities. Some researchers focused on factors that play an important role in how the implementation of data-driven decision making (DDDM) practices engage faculty and administrators, such as the organizational culture, the institution's policies, and leadership. Other studies focused on the limitations and challenges that faculty and employees have when they join assessment activities and the use of data for improvement. In this area studies pointed out a need of further empirical research. Consequently, there is a need to advance in the understanding of the voice and perceptions of student services administrators who are directly involved in assessment practices and drive decisions that impact student success in college.

This DiP will seek to interview a group of student services personnel who lead the assessment practices in their departments within the Division of Student Affairs at South County College to gain insight about their perceptions of data, the use of it in their practices, and the challenges that they encounter in making data-driven decisions. The findings will contribute to the literature and help to better understand the experiences of colleges and universities in the process of implementing a culture of improvement and data practices within the institution that

work towards furthering student outcomes (Cox et al., 2017). To my local context, the findings will help South County College to elucidate the specific needs that our internal stakeholders have when engaging in assessment activities and the use of assessment data; as well as plan better opportunities to enrich data literacy initiatives that will prepare our internal community in the use of data for improvement.

CHAPTER 3

INVESTIGATIVE APPROACH

Introduction

This exploratory study used a qualitative case study approach since the aim was to explore a complex phenomenon that student services face when using student assessment data to inform decision-making and make improvement in their areas. Since this phenomenon occurs in a real-life context, a case study on the Division of Student Affairs (DSA) at South County College (SCC) is the bounded system that provide a holistic description on how data-driven decision making (DDDM) practices take place (Merriam, 1998). Due to the limited studies and literature regarding the use of data for improvement in Higher Education, especially in student affairs, the goal of this study was to provide a deep dive into the data practices and challenges that the group of student services personnel face when using data for student success.

This chapter will highlight how each data collection method contributed to responding to each of the research questions. The section is organized by research methods and their respective sampling and data collection procedure. It also includes the analysis plan that describe the strategy approach for coding and discussed the potential limitations to the study.

Research Design

The focal point of this case study was the Division of Student Affairs (DSA) at South County College (SCC). The DSA provides support to the seven departments that are located at each of the SCC locations, where the daily operations of each department take place. These departments are: (1) ACCESS (A Comprehensive Center for Exceptional Student Services), (2) Admissions and Registration, (3) Advisement and Career Services, (4) International Students, (5) Recruitment Services, (6) Student Life, and (7) Testing and Assessment.

To plan and execute institutional strategies, each department works collaboratively as a college-wide service area. Consequently, the unit of analysis of this qualitative case study involves seven embedded service areas supported by the DSA.

The study explored ways in which these college-wide actors value and interpret student data and use it to inform their decisions and activities. Accordingly, this study draws some of the outcome-based assessment cycle (Bresciani, 2019; Palomba & Banta, 1999) that universities and colleges develop to measure the effectiveness of their student outcomes. From the current adapted SCC’s assessment cycle (see Figure 1) the research questions of this study contributed to a better understanding of the actions undertaken by student services personnel when engaging in the selection of data sources (step 2), the planning, collection, and analysis of data (step 3-4), and the use of results (step 5). By engaging multiple student services members’ perspectives on how they perceive and understand data and use it, this case study will provide the researcher evidence on how DDDM practices occur at the student support services departments to enhance policies and procedures around the culture of data and improvement at the division level.

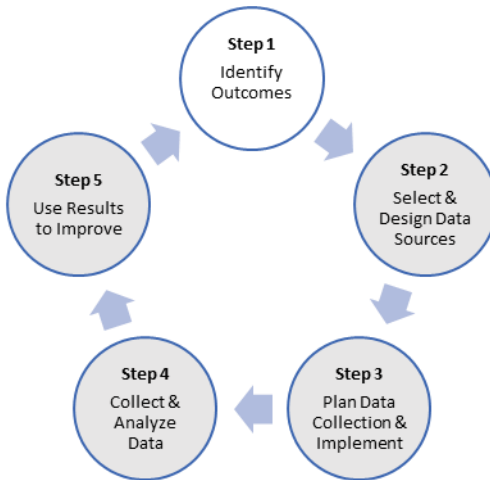


Figure 1. *South County College Assessment Cycle*

In conclusion, this study explored the use of assessment data of student services personnel, the qualitative case study approach supported the deeper understanding of this phenomena within the Division of Student Affairs at SCC. Corresponding, the use of various

data collection methods contributed to the understanding of the phenomenon studied (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Data Sources

This study had three main research questions. The first research question seeks to understand how data is defined within the division (RQ1), Second, how members of the division use data (RQ2), Thirdly, the challenges that the student services personnel face when using data (RQ3). To respond to the first and second research question, a document analysis was conducted to the Annual Effectiveness Reports (AERs) of seven departments for two consecutive years (2020-21, and 2021-22). Subsequently, to gather in-depth information regarding the three research questions, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted in this study. Consequently, document analysis of the AERs and interviews with group leads from each college-wide service were served as the main two sources of data for this study.

Documents

Documents are a good data source for qualitative research since they already exist and can disclose insights about the research topic studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the review of the potential documents that can serve this study, the Annual Effectiveness Report (AER) offered relevant information about assessment practices executed by each of the departments at the college. Since the early 2000's, every year each DSA college-wide unit at the college produces an AER that provides information about unit's planning, assessments, evaluation practices related to their accomplishments of the year (Section 1), contributions to the strategic plan (Section 2), unit's goals (Section 3), and their outcomes assessment practices (Section 4). This document is also an official document for internal and external purposes at the institution. The information presented in this document illustrates the level of commitment of the different departments to use data, the evidence on how they use data in their areas. In addition, this document is used as one of the main documents that the institution provides to the regional accreditation organization to demonstrate the way that the college measures effectiveness of the academic and non-academic areas.

The document analysis of the Annual Effectiveness Report (AER) served to identify the initial findings of this study and clarified additional follow up questions to be asked in the interviews with the college-wide administrative leads of the units. For instance, the elements of inquiry to be identified in the AERs connected to evidence of DDDM practices and examples of type of data used, and how each of those examples or data are used to inform decisions, support accomplishment, and/or document findings. At the end, this document analysis identified possible themes that helped to compare with the information provided in the interviews (triangulation strategy) and to better understand the process of using data within the Division of Student Affairs.

Document Sampling. Given that each department college-wide unit within the Division of Student Affairs (DSA) produces one Annual Effectiveness Report (AER), for the purposes of this research a document analysis of two AER for each department were included in the study to conclude with the revision of 14 annual reports corresponding to two academic years 2020-21 and 2021-22. The information from the AERs documents informed about the unit's practices regarding the use of data and became the main document to be analyzed for the purpose of this study.

Interviews

The second source of data was semi-structured interviews with college-wide departmental administrative leads who met the criteria for inclusion in the study from seven of the DSA departments. Since the purpose of this study was to understand the participant's experience and the meaning of these DDDM practices, interviewing college-wide administrative leads provided rich qualitative information regarding the participants' beliefs, perspectives, motives, and feelings on the DDDM practices in their individual units as well as in their division. These semi-structured interviews consisted of a set of topics and related questions that addressed specific experiences, processes, and perspectives of the student support services administrator (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) about how they define data, what type of data sources are the most currently used in their departments. The interview also asked participants to share specific examples of the department's use of those data sources and what steps the department takes to ensure that data can be used and what are the main uses of this data. Finally, participants had the

opportunity to share helpful situations and challenges that they face when working with data. The interview questions were refined based on two pilot interviews of academic support services directors at South County College conducted during spring of 2022. A description of the interview questions is provided in the Appendix A.

Interviews Sampling. The college-wide leads were informants who have experience working in their areas as well as being involved in leading assessment practices within their departments. Considering that group leads are appointed by college leadership every two years, these administrative leads played a critical role in their service area’s (also known as units/departments) experience. This study used a purposive sampling with a criteria-based strategy to identify those specific administrators—participants whose stories and experiences have a rich and deep information that can help understand the dynamics of the phenomenon studied (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

The criteria-based sampling strategy required that these college-wide leads should have at least one year leading the institutional strategies of their departments. Another important criterion considered was the heterogeneity of subjects (Kazdin, 1981 as cited in Lee at 2010), so a representation of the seven embedded units were recruited. At the end, using the criteria-based strategy, a pool of seven participants participated in the interviews. Consequently, the researcher got a representation of 4 of the seven departments (see Table 1).

Table 1

List of Study Participants

Department	Annual Effectiveness Report	Interview
Department A	2	1
Department B	2	-
Department C	2	2
Department D	2	2
Department E	2	-
Department F	2	2
Department G	2	-

Data Collection

After IRB approval was granted by Florida State University and South County College, the researcher identified the potential criterion-based participants and invited them via email to

participate in the study (see Appendix B). Since the participation of student support services personnel was voluntary and self-selected (Seidman, 2019), the researcher had a total of seven participants from four of the seven student services departments. This representation assured that inferences reflected DDDM practices within the division in general and not specific of individual's reflection.

The semi-structured interviews were scheduled for 30–45 minutes and conducted virtually via zoom. Before interviews took place, participants completed an electronic consent form to acknowledge their participation in the study. This consent form included the audio and video recording permission and a statement about protection of their anonymity and confidentiality (see Appendix C). The interviews were recorded with the participant's permission and pseudonyms were used to ensure the confidentiality of participants and their departments throughout the collection and analysis stages.

To access to the AER documentation, the researcher reached out to the Division of Institutional Effectiveness, who are the gatekeepers of the Annual Effectiveness Reports (AERs) for the College and got access to the AERs of 2020-21 and 2021-22 of the seven aforementioned student support services departments. The review of these documents began with the de-identification of the reports and uploaded them into the NVivo platform to start the analysis. The coding of each report focused on the following sections of the document: outcome assessment (Section 4), unit's goals (Section 3), and accomplishments of the academic year (Section 1).

Data Analysis

Since this study is a case study with multiple embedded departments, the analysis strategy consisted of analyzing the interviews and documents for each of the departments and across of the departments (Baxter & Jack, 2018). Once data was collected, the researcher transcribed the interviews and started the coding process using NVivo. In the first cycle of coding, the researcher used a combination of deductive and inductive reasoning process to interpret the data by going from specific comments throughout the interviews and applying some a priori codes identified in the literature (See Table 2) and an In Vivo coding (Saldana, 2021). In Vivo coding implies identifying recurrent verbatim phrases from the interview's transcripts (Saldana, 2021).

The a priori codes were identified based on constructs from the literature that informed the initial stage of analysis and coding. Constructs from previous studies related to the elements that constitute student data and the meaning of data included student success measures (graduation, retention, standardized test), input data (e.g., demographics, grades), and process data (e.g., teaching, assessment, surveys) (Ikemoto & Marsh, 2007 as cited in Hora, et al., 2017). With regards to the second research question on data-use, the literature suggested that data is used by faculty and staff to improve teaching and learning strategies, adjust or improve courses, or programs, and/or make decisions about personnel and programs (Cox et al., 2007; Joughin et al., 2017; Phuong et al., 2017). Finally, for the last research question that focused on challenges faced by different stakeholders when engaging in DDDM practices in higher education, the literature and studies suggested the potential challenges are accessibility of data, perceptions of data, lack of knowledge, expertise, and/or training, lack of time etc. (Brower et al., 2020; Goomas & Isabel; 2015; Hora et al., 2017; Reese & Hutching, 2016). Challenges for student affairs personnel, studies showed that there is a lack of collaborative work among departments and a lack of understanding of assessment, data-use expectations (Bresciani et al., 2009 in Cox et al., 2017; Taylor 2020). Accordingly, some of the a priori codes were used in the initial stages for coding the interviews and documents.

Table 2

List of A Priori Codes

Research Topic	A priori code
Meaning of Data	Student Success Measures Input Data Process Data
Use of Data	Reporting Improving Making Decisions
Challenges	Knowledge Understanding Time Accessibility Collaboration Training

For the second cycle of coding, the pattern coding was used to condense and summarize large number of codes into smaller categories and themes; as well as identify a pattern of action, relationships, and explanations (Saldana, 2021) that helped to reflect the similarities and distinctions within and across departments in the Division of Students Affairs.

Researcher Positionality, Trustworthiness, & Other Considerations

Since one of the main considerations of qualitative research is the role of the researcher as the main instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), this exploratory case study recognized that I, as researcher have some subjectivities (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002 in Owen, 2014) due to my position and level of involvement and awareness of the assessment practices within the institution. I have worked as college administrator for more than five years in the Assessment Office. In this capacity, I was involved in reviewing AER's documentation, as well as I offered consultation to the different departments at the institution on how to provide evidence to better support their AER's documentation. This experience, along with my interest on improving assessment practices and the use of evidence to promote college community effectiveness, motivated me to explore the current data-driven decision-making practices in the Division of Student Affairs in a more systematic way.

Although, I am not longer directly working with the AER process, I was conscious of having previous direct interaction with some of the possible participants in this study. Consequently, I mitigated my influence and interest on the research by continuously self-reflecting on my bias and assumptions about what I knew these student support services were doing and what they shared in this study. For instance, I wrote memos to reflect my assumptions and contrasted them with the information shared and reviewed throughout the interviews and documentation. I did this practice before, during, and at the end of the data collection and analysis process, so it allowed me to identify any preconceptions in the analysis process. During the process of data collection, I reminded the participants of this study of that my role in this study did not relate as my role as assessment administrator at the institution.

To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the study, I included the use of multiple sources of data (document analysis and interviews) to support the triangulation strategy to

identify connections of the findings within participants and consistency among different data sources (Lee et al., 2010). I also used the member-checking technique (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) where I shared a summary of findings organized by the suggested themes to the participants to ensure that what was captured in the interviews and analysis reflected the departments' experiences and inferences of their comments. In this process, four of the seven participants responded to this inquiry by confirming the findings. Lastly, I created an audit trail of methods used and steps followed throughout the study to warrant credibility and validity of my study. For the audit trail, I recorded memos in NVivo where I described the different steps undertaken during the data collection and stages of the analysis process for each department and within the division.

Limitations

The potential limitations for this case study relate to the potential subjectivity that I brought to the study and the sample by the unit analysis. To overcome these potential limitations, first I was aware of my role of safeguarding the participants' voices. To do so, I removed any participants' identifiers that could affect my pre-conceptions about their experiences, and I wrote memos before and after of each interview to reflect and review any potential misapprehension of the analysis. Ultimately, I was aware that the findings of this study were limited due to department-specific sampling. Originally, I planned to have two participants by department, but due to this was a volunteer process of participation and some departments did not attend the invitation; the number of participants were limited to half of the potential group and drawing conclusions may do not reflect entirely the data practices of the entire division, but rather present an exploratory overview of the divisions' practices. Therefore, a disclaimer note is provided when presenting findings and conclusions.

Summary

In summary, this case study on the Division of Student Affairs at South County College helped to explore the dynamics and processes that occur on this division and how student services personnel from different sub-units engaged in assessment practices conducive to the use of data. The methods of data collection designed in this case study, document content analysis and semi-structured interviews facilitated the gathering of evidence and uncovered the student services personnel experiences in executing DDDM practices. Consequently, the rigorous research design, member-checking, triangulation, and audit trail processes that support the data analysis strengthened the trustworthiness and validity of this case study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND DISSEMINATION PLAN

This chapter will present a summary of the purpose, methodology, and research questions of the data-driven decision-making practices that occur in the Division of Student Affairs at South County College. The chapter will then present its findings and discuss the implications based on the literature reviewed. Next, it will provide recommendations identified for the local context identified by stakeholders within the institution. Lastly, a discussion plan to share the results with key stakeholders will be described as well.

Study Summary

The national tendency of moving from a culture of compliance to a culture of evidence and improvement (Manning, 2011) is impacting college and university practices. Studies related to the use of data in higher education institutions have focused on course evaluations and student feedback to inform decisions in the classroom and instruction (Borch et al., 2020; Phuong et al., 2017). Although these studies addressed some elements of how faculty are using assessments and data to inform decisions in their instruction, there is still a need to know more about how student services units in colleges and universities are using data for improving student outcomes. South County College is joining the efforts of using data to improve student learning outcomes; but there is still limited evidence on how student services personnel engage in the use of data to make contributions to student success (Joughin et al., 2017). Consequently, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how the Division of Student Affairs at South County College uses data to promote student success. The research questions that guided this study were (1) How does the Division of Student Affairs define data?, (2) How does the Division of Student Affairs use data?, and (3) What challenges do student affairs personnel have when using data?. The results of this study identified ways in which student affairs professionals define data, what specific data is used to identify students' needs and satisfaction, and information that guides them in making decisions towards enhancing student's experience in their college years.

This qualitative case study included analysis of fourteen departmental annual reports (two per department) and interviews with seven student services personnel from four of the seven departments within the division. After collecting data, the inductive analysis was used to identify patterns in the data using a priori codes and In Vivo coding process (Saldana, 2021). After the coding process, the codes were grouped into categories, and then classified by themes. Lastly, four of the seven participants verified the themes using a member-checking strategy.

Findings

The presentation of the identified themes is grouped by research question. For each research question, I describe the themes that emerged from the analysis and support the findings using direct quotations from the interviews and annual reports. As the qualitative analysis approach includes triangulation as a method to confirm consistency of the findings, the quotes were extracted and intersected from both data collection methods: the analysis of Annual Reports (AR) and participants’ interviews. The pseudonyms used in the departments’ annual reports are identified as “AR” followed by the number one (1) for the 2020-21 academic year, and the number two (2) for the 2021-22 academic year. The pseudonyms of participants in the interviews were selected randomly based upon the letter assigned to each department. Pseudonyms are not gender related and do not have any specific meaning or relation to participants (see Table 3). In addition, participants’ quotes were redacted by eliminating words such as “you know”, “uhm”, “so” to provide a clearer readability.

Table 3

List of Participants Pseudonyms

Department	Annual Reports’ Pseudonymous	Participants’ Pseudonyms
Department A	Department A (AR 1), (AR2)	Aada
Department B	Department B (AR 1), (AR2)	
Department C	Department C (AR 1), (AR2)	Caily & Caisy
Department D	Department D (AR 1), (AR2)	Daily & Daffy
Department E	Department E (AR 1), (AR2)	
Department F	Department F (AR 1), (AR2)	Faily & Faye
Department G	Department G (AR 1), (AR2)	

Research Question 1: How does the Division of Student Affairs define data?

Two overarching themes emerged regarding how participants in this study described the meaning of data. The first theme is centered on data being defined by the sources or platforms' name, or simply the name of the office from which the data is retrieved. The second theme highlighted the importance of data in their operations. This last theme will be presented as an introductory theme for the findings of the second research question.

Theme 1: Data Described as Source

This theme addresses the participants' perception of what data means to them. Participants throughout the interviews felt comfortable describing the data based on the name of the source, platform, or office that provided the data. For instance, when participants were asked to describe data, they commonly used the name of Institutional Research (IR) "data" to refer to student outcome data (e.g., enrollment, retention, completion). In other occasions they utilized the name of platforms to describe the data. An example is noted in Department B's annual report when it describes how: "EAB Navigate was utilized for appointment campaigns and student outreach, as well as monitoring enrollment for immigration compliance."

Similarly, *Faily's* description of the use of the IR page provides further evidence of how participants in the study defined data by the source and type of student success measures data that participants seek. *Faily* mentioned that: "We have IR page, we look at that data on a daily basis to see the campus enrollment, to see how many students we have. We also look at retention numbers, to see students were able to retain from year-to-year, semester to semester."

Additionally, participants described the data based on their methods collection, such as attendance sheets, counting number of events, trainings, and/or using platforms to follow up students' behaviors, grades, enrollment. On the annual reports, *Department E* described data by detailing their approach to gathering students' participation in events or training using the name of their departmental platforms for repository of this data. *Department E (AR1)*: "In an effort to fully utilize [Platform X] and streamline data collection, the data was tracked via [Platform X]."

Theme 2: Data Described as a Tool

This theme highlights participants' perceptions on the value of data as information and resource that allows student service units to know more about student needs, behaviors, and paths of success. For instance, *Daffy* stated: "Data is basically the tool that we use to make changes or create things that can help us in pursuit of offering that services that we do, and also, helping our students move along their educational path." Likewise, *Faily* reaffirmed that data guides her department's initiatives towards students: "Data is that tool that would definitely help you fine tune your initiatives that would help provide support to students in a way that is intentional and in a way that is not overwhelming to them." *Faye* aligned data with what potentially they can use it: "Data is anything that we can collect that we can later analyze, for I guess, for improving any processes."

Consequently, this theme suggests that participants conceive data as an important tool to use that provides valuable student information to identify student's needs, to track their initiatives, and to make improvements in the services provided to students. In this manner, participants often describe data in terms of its use and functionality. The following themes under research question two will elaborate more on the participants' uses of data.

Research Question 2: How does the Division of Student Affairs use data?

The qualitative data gathered to respond to this research question identified two main themes related to how the division uses assessment data internally as department and externally with the college community. The first theme points to the use of data to understand and improve departmental practices to enhance student experience. The second theme considers the reporting as evidence of units' success.

Theme 1: Data used to Understand and Improve

This theme addresses one of the major practices that student service personnel perform when using the data within their departments. Participants indicated that data collected in their areas allow them to identify areas of improvement in departmental operations (Subtheme 1b) which directly or indirectly enhance students' experiences (Subtheme 1a).

Understand and Enhance Student Experience. In the interviews participants commented that the data served to improve departmental practices which directly enhance student experiences. Participants described enrollment, retention, and completion data as the most common types of data used that helps them to identify and ascertain the number of students who need support to continue their career path in college by helping them enroll in classes, help with the college's paperwork, and/or simply to know their needs. Accordingly, departments implement new strategies that help them to reach out to students and meet student needs. For instance, *Faily* described: "What we do with that data is we reach out to the students, we create interventions, we keep track of them, and we provide interventions based on those reasons." This is also evident in the annual report, *Department E (AR 2)*: "In response to their first engaging [Event X], which occurred via online modality in December 2020, we received great feedback from our student participants. This feedback led to their return to our [Event X]' in-person format that occurred in December 2021."

Surveys were the most cited type of data on the annual reports for all departments as well as in the interviews. When talking about surveys, participants have a good understanding of the different uses that this data can offer to their practices. Participants showed confidence in identifying surveys as a main tool to assess student satisfaction, receive feedback from students, and or to evaluate their department's initiatives and events. Annual reports from *Departments D, and F* explicitly cited the college's institutional and or departmental surveys. *Department D (AR1)*: "The Q-Flow Point of Service Survey also was used to monitor students' satisfaction with the quality of service (staff courtesy, staff knowledge, instructions received, wait time, overall customer service)." *Department F (AR 2)*: "Point of Service (POS) surveys are administered at the end of each [department] session to assess student satisfaction with [department] services after an on-campus or virtual visit."

Participants use survey data to make improvements that respond to students' concerns. For instance, one of the participants in the interviews described that they use students' particular comments on the feedback to call back the student to better understand students' dissatisfaction or concern. *Caisy* explained that her area has made some changes in students' forms due to feedback provided from students. She stated: "We also gather feedback from students, we review

the form and make changes. For example, adding more information, given instructions on how to load certain forms, we have made changes based on qualitative data.”

Improve Department Operations. An interesting practice revealed on this subtheme is that participants use surveys to improve departmental practices that indirectly impact the student experience. *Daffy* stated: “Mostly of the data that I work, we can look at either the feedback that we get from the surveys to improve services, waiting time, or anything for the student or the department.” Similarly, the understanding of this practice—use data for improvement—was also evident in their annual documents where they clearly stated how the use of data helped their units to improve their services to students and on some occasions to make decisions on incorporating training, guidance materials.

Department F (AR 1): The results assisted in improving our business and operational practices to inform our customer service skills and strategies with our students. Based on student feedback, front-desk personnel received additional customer service training, including new handouts which provide details on regular questions that students ask.

Additionally, participants use data to check and improve the efficiency of their services based on their internal systems. As *Faye* described: “I see people registering for that appointment a lot, I open more seats for that time, that tends to say that more people prefer that time for an appointment, so if I open more seats I should get more people.”

Based on comments and examples provided above on how participants use data, there is evidence and opportunity for these departments to build on the use data for making decisions. Even though participants did not necessarily use the term “making decisions”, those examples above describe actions based on data that involve internal decisions on the way that departments operated or enhanced practices that directly impact students.

Theme 2: Data used to Report Evidence of Success

This reporting theme is the most common approach used by participants to share with stakeholders the way they use data to demonstrate departmental success. In general, data is used to inform their supervisors, leadership, and the college community of their accomplishments and

advances of their goals. A clear example is Department D's response to a question on the report about how they share data among colleagues. *Department D (AR 1)* stated: "The area communicated the results of the assessments through monthly reports to campus leadership and presentations during student services leadership meetings." Additionally, *Faily* commented: "We use the data to document the AER report every year, we have specific goals and commitments for area. We create the goals by using the data to make informed decisions and then we report results."

The annual reports offer another example of the theme of reporting. The annual reports document is used to summarize the department's successes and demonstrate how they use data to support their advances and improvements. *Department E and B* clearly described it in their reports. *Department E (AR2)*: "Through these student engagement webinars, we were able to convert 195 traditional students into student leaders this past academic year. This is over a 400% increase from our anticipated goal of recruiting 40 students to convert into student leaders." And *Department B (AR 1)*: "To assess the effectiveness of this academic year 2020-2021, participants were surveyed. Based on the responses, the most effective activities were the driver's license workshop, and employment workshops. We will continue the peer mentor program and expand our activity offerings."

Likewise, when asking participants about their involvement in writing this annual report, they confirmed that documenting everything in this report is important and it is a collaborative effort between their colleagues and them.

Daily described: In this report, it's a group effort because every campus will have to submit their information either for a particular goal that we have from the year before. Then we need to see which goals we will have for the following year as a team as all the unit together.

Research Question 3: What challenges do student services personnel have in using data?

The analysis of the responses concerning to this question offers two main themes emphasized by participants when discussing the challenges that they faced when working with data: accessibility to data sources and more data literacy training.

Theme 1: Accessibility to Data

This theme presents one of the major challenges stressed by participants. There are two areas where the improvement of accessibility is needed: (1) more data access for staff and colleagues and (2) information and communication about data availability.

Greater Access. Participants indicated that there is a need for more colleagues within their departments to have access to the data. This desire comes with the experience of participants who already have access to data and recognized the importance and value of this data access. *Caily* stated: “Definitely giving us access to data is giving us power to do what we need to do, so that to me it’s an obstacle not having access to do what we have to do.” *Daily* reaffirmed this when talking about her experience as data liaison. Data Liaisons is an institutional initiative managed by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness that provides to a select a group of colleges’ employees the tools and training required to improve their skills related to data literacy and shared-best practices required to access college data platforms and produce data analysis and reports. In this matter, *Daily* stated: “I think that helped me, and for a lot of people, was the opening of the accessibility to get the data. I think that helps a lot... Probably that's what we get the key to that, to the magic.”

Accordingly, participants indicated that campuses and areas do not have enough personnel with access to data, and other areas claimed that they did not have access at all, although they needed it based upon their services. This need for colleagues claiming access of data more largely within the division is mentioned by *Aada*, *Faily*, and *Daffy* in their response of what they need that the college support more their department on using data for improvement. *Aada* stated: “I think more access to it by our staff.” *Faily* described: “We have four directors that are new, and they don't even have access to KPI data in Power BI or the access that I have.

It's an impediment for my unit and from a teamwork perspective.” *Daffy* also said: “We have a grant manager, and she doesn't have access to Power BI and she's looking for information for her program. You know that makes kind of difficult... she's capable of doing things, but she just doesn't have the access.” *Faily* also said: “Is that depending on your rank, you get certain type of access. The biggest impediment is when you don't have access to the data, and you have to wait for somebody else to provide data.”

Although participants recognize that the college has made great improvements of having more data available in the past years and continue providing more access, participants also acknowledge that this accessibility needs to improve by creating procedures regarding who and what level of access certain roles should have. To illustrate this point, *Caily* stated: “We still need to move forward, not to control too much the access to data, is to make better regulations in terms of data, because I need my directors, my managers, to be able to pull reports.”

More Communication. Communication about the type of data that is available and who has access to it is something that participants also emphasized when talking about challenges related to accessibility. Participants considered that information regarding accessibility to data is not necessarily shared at large within the college community. *Caisy* stated: “Many people ask for certain access in the system that they don't realize they have it, but they never used it. Kind of communication awareness, like what type of access you have, and what can you do with it.” *Faye* mentioned: “The challenge that I experience sometimes is that we're always trying to improve as a college, we don't keep in mind that we need to share that information or the changes that happened in the department with all the area.”

Similarly, *Faily* explained that communication about data access and accessibility should be provided during the onboarding process for their colleagues.

Faily: For example, when we hire a new administrator maybe part of the onboarding process will be to have somebody from IR from another department reach out and say, welcome to the college we're happy that you're in your new role. If you need access to data or you know you're going to be needed access it looks like you're going to be needed access to your data based on your role, complete this form.

These participants' comments suggest that more communication about data is needed. This communication is something that should come from the leadership and should be systematically established, for instance as an initial training for new employees.

Theme 2: Availability to Data Training

This theme supports participants' expectations and needs regarding learning about data. Participants stated how training plays an important role when working with data and recognized that there is still a challenge regardless of their experience and training already received. For those participants who already have participated in training as data liaisons, they value and recognize the importance of training and they are appreciative of it. *Faily* stated: "I think that every director at each campus should go through the training that I went through and should be part of the data liaison team."

Participants also mentioned some formal training received either by being Data Liaisons (institution's initiative regarding data literacy) or participated in specific data security trainings (e.g., FERPA, IT records security). When talking about what type of training or data literacy is needed, their perception varies upon their experience and contact with data. For some, the training should focus on sharing some best practices of pulling data, learning about different sources of data, and learning some advanced tools in Excel that are commonly used when working with data. Other participants described the need for more advanced level training in data security, analysis and or presenting data. *Aada's* and *Caisy's* comments are related to basic training. *Aada* stated: "I think a challenge like, Am I pulling it the right way? Am I extrapolating my clicking the right pivot buttons? Am I clicking the right things to sort it by, that would be my biggest worry and challenge." *Caisy* suggested: "Training in technologies, how you're able to use this data, how to create a pivot table. I will say that training and technology on how and what are the different ways that you're able to use this data for." *Daffy* focused on more advanced level training and recommended: "I think the monthly meetings are a great tool to keep us updated on how we can use data tools. Specifically, having people give examples as to what they've done with different data sets and how they do it."

Lastly, participants indicated that time is also a limitation when trying to work with data and learn to use it. Time is seen by these participants as dedicating some hours of working with data that perhaps they do not have availability due to their schedules. For others, the challenge relates to not having enough time to learn and/or receive training. An example is *Faily's* response below of what she describes as challenge working with data:

Faily: The only challenge that I face right now is time. I wish I can dedicate like two hours a day to just go through all my data, so I do it in between meetings, I do it from home. There's a lot of data and there's not enough time.

Implications

Meaning of Data

As study participants discussed data, they mostly described it with student success measures (e.g., enrollment, retention) and qualitative data such as surveys. These descriptions are consistent with the literature reviewed and the definition of data provided by Ikemoto & Marsh 2017 that focuses on student success outcomes, process (assessments) and input data. Similarly, findings from this study confirmed that student services personnel data-driven decision-making practices are consistent with data practices described in K-12. Data is used to understand students' needs, and inform and assess services and strategies (Hamilton et al., 2009; Simmons, 2012)

Data Driven Decision Making (DDDM) Practices

The use of data for decision-making by the participants of this study provides further evidence on the uses of data and the different types of data used in their practices. For instance, this is marked when participants in this study described the use of enrollment data to create strategies to approach students, or the use of survey data to adjust students' forms, continue student events' programing, enhanced services, or simply created a new handout to provide a more consistent service. Accordingly, these examples provided are empirical evidence claimed

by previous studies (Joughin et al., 2017) on how the use of data makes changes and produces improvements in student's outcomes.

Consequently, based upon on the different data practices described on the previous paragraph, the way in which participants shared the advances of college data availability, and the emphasis also of data used as support documentation of their goals on the annual document, it is evident that the college leadership and the division of student affairs are leading efforts towards facilitating a culture of improvement among their staff. In other words, the findings of this study support literature when referring to the role of leadership plays an important role in DDDM practices (Dejean et al., 2018; Guetterman & Mitchell, 2016).

Challenges

As study participants reflected on challenges when working with data, they endorsed what has been found in other studies as data challenges for faculty and staff: data accessibility, expertise of data use, and lack of time (Brower et al., 2020; Hora et al., 2017; Reese & Hutching, 2015). Considerably, this study reinforces the need of practitioners for data literacy training and for better ways of making data more accessible. This is reiterated when participants state that data is something that is not necessarily part of what they do and still something that they need to learn and be trained.

Similarly, although participants recognize progress on how the college has been providing access to certain groups, there is still the need to create regulations, processes and enhance communication channels on how to share and provide access to the data. This type of needs were evident in the interviews for those who mentioned are already working with data and felt the need for more established processes around them. These findings provide evidence on the role and importance of the institution's policies and norms around data practices and data culture (Brower et al., 2020; Guetterman & Mitchell, 2016) that facilitates data-driven decision making (DDDM) practices and continues promoting the culture of improvement among different stakeholders within the institution.

Finally, the results of this study and the challenges noted by this group of practitioners in student affairs imply that clear communication about access and data availability, enhancement of training opportunities, and established procedures and policies on the use of data are the necessary conditions to foster a culture of data within the student affairs division and at the South County College at large.

Recommendations

To support the improvement of data-driven decision-making practices among student services personnel, this section draws on the findings of this study to propose recommendations to two primary stakeholders who can directly benefit from this study. These primary stakeholders are the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, who is the primary generator of data, and the Division of Student Affairs (DSA), who is the primary consumer of data. While this recommendation section will focus on the contributions of this study to these offices, other departments may benefit from this study to continue to advance a culture of evidence and improvement within the college at large.

The first recommendation corresponds to Student Affairs, the second to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, and the third recommendation is a shared recommendation for both stakeholders.

Recommendation #1. Enhance Data Processes and Procedures

As participants in the study recognized the need for a better understanding of processes of who can access the data and how this access is made available, the Division of Student Affairs leaders could enhance data accessibility processes within the Division. This would include the creation of a data accessibility audit to review and enhance internal processes related to data availability, data needs, and data access. For instance, since the overall challenge reiterated by participants is to increase access to data, one of the first procedures to be reviewed could be to determine which directors and staff within DSA departments require data access and transfer it to

job descriptions functions that allow better alignment with other data management processes necessary, such as training and access.

Recommendation #2. Expand Data Literacy Training

Because participants recognized training is a challenge in their data practices and there is appreciation of the Data Liaison initiative by those participated in the program, the Institutional Effectiveness Office could expand this initiative to continue to enhance the learning about data and promote its use among college community. The expansion of this Data Liaison would include the creation of different levels of training to attend the different needs of data literacy. It also would include a series of train the trainers with the former group of data liaisons. For instance, some initial training can be included as part of onboarding sessions for new employees and can include an introduction to the different data sources and dashboards available and the methodologies used (e.g., data inclusions and exclusions). The next level could include more hands-on experience of data demonstration and best practices of using different data resources, and also offer training on the use different type of data collection tools available (e.g., surveys, focus groups). In this level, former data liaisons would serve as trainers in their campuses and areas. More advanced training would be offered to key stakeholders and data liaisons group. This training could focus on data visualizations, on best practices for presenting, generating discussions about data, and making decisions.

Recommendation #3. Improve Communication and Collaboration

Participants were grateful for the opportunities to learn about data practices through the data liaisons initiative and expressed their desire to expand this kind of opportunity to their student services colleagues and staff. Similarly, participants also noted the need to establish better communication strategies regarding data within their departments and across the institution. Consequently, to improve communication and collaboration within the departments and divisions, the Division of Student Affairs could create spaces and time for student services personnel to collectively share their data practices and build up their learning based upon their interaction with their colleagues. This strategy will increase collaboration among DSA departments and create more engagement and a culture of improvement within the division.

Since data availability, enhancement of data visualization, and new processes would occur anytime, the Institutional Effectiveness Office could improve its communication practices with the college community to convey updated information regarding data governance and management in a regular basis. A recommendation is to establish a monthly or quarterly letter/email from the Institutional Effectiveness Office regarding new updates of technical advances on data visualization, dashboard enhancements, and/or colleges' data governance and management. This email/letter should be distributed to the data customers throughout the college internal system. In addition, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness could create Lunch and Learn sessions that can be scheduled quarterly to demonstrate the new advances and data tools available to all college stakeholders including the Division of Student Affairs.

Conclusion

This study reports how student services personnel in the Division of Student Affairs at South County College conceive data, the kinds of data practices they engage in, and challenges their experience. The major findings of this study contribute to the student affairs practitioners' understanding of data as information collected in surveys, attendance sheets, and the enrollment, retention, and completion. This understanding of data allows student affairs practitioners to identify students' needs in their career path of success. Data from this study also illustrates the most common uses of data by the Division. Furthermore, higher education practitioners will gain understanding of data used to improve students' experience, internal processes, and report departments' success. This information can be used to determine ways in which the Division of Student Affairs can promote their contributions to impact student success outcomes. Lastly, challenges faced by student services personnel when working with data relates to data accessibility and training. Therefore, this study can be used to improve professional development efforts in data literacy, enhance procedures on data accessibility, and improve communication and collaboration towards a culture of data use in the student affairs field.

Dissemination Plan

The results of this exploratory study benefit two primary stakeholders at the college: the Division of Student Affairs and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Results will be presented first to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and then to the Division of Student Affairs. More broadly, other stakeholders at the college can benefit from the findings of this study to identify further recommendations that promote data-driven practices.

Office of Institutional Effectiveness

The results of this study will be presented in one of the bi-weekly meetings scheduled by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. A detailed Power Point deck will be used to present the findings and recommendations to generate discussion among this group of stakeholders. This will allow them to streamline recommendations, communication strategies, and procedures towards improving the culture of evidence among the institution and the Division of Student Affairs. In addition, the Power Point deck will be presented in one of the Data Liaisons sessions as an opportunity to engage them with some of the recommendations and further discussions on data practices with the college community.

Division of Student Affairs' Leadership

To disseminate the findings and implications of this study to the deans and leadership within the Division of Student Affairs, a brief report, two-page document front and back of a single page will be prepared and shared via email. The first side will highlight the major themes from the findings, and the other side will convey specific recommendations for the Division. In addition, a Power Point presentation deck will be prepared to share relevant qualitative results that can inform opportunities of improvements practices within the Division. This presentation can be delivered during one of the Student Dean's council meetings led by the Vice Provost.

APPENDIX A

FSU IRB APPROVAL MEMO

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
OFFICE of the VICE PRESIDENT for RESEARCH



EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

April 28, 2022

Yahemn Baeza Dager

Dear Yahemn Baeza Dager:

On 4/28/2022, the IRB staff reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review: Exempt

(2)(ii) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation (low risk)

Title: Data-Driven Decision-Making Practices: An Exploratory Case Study of the Division of Student Affairs at a Community College

Investigator: Yahemn Baeza Dager

Submission ID: STUDY00003132

Study ID: STUDY00003132

Funding: None

Grant ID: None

IND, IDE, or HDE: None

Documents Reviewed: • Baeza_DDDM Practices, Category: IRB Protocol;

- Baeza_Interview_Protocol, Category: Protocol;
- Baeza_Participant_Consent_Form, Category: Consent Form;
- Baeza_Participant_Email_Recruitment, Category: Recruitment Materials;

The IRB staff determined the protocol qualifies for exemption, and where applicable the IRB has determined that the protocol qualifies for approval in accordance with federal regulatory requirements for Limited IRB review, effective on 4/28/2022. Further IRB review and approval by this organization is not required.

COVID-19 Information for Research Involving Human Subjects: Note that the U.S. is operating under the national emergency Proclamation 9994 concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and that this national emergency remains in effect until rescinded or terminated by the President of the U.S. (go here for the Proclamation letter). Conditions are dynamic and related policies or guidance evolve accordingly; as applicable, refer to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website specific for universities or refer to our COVID-19 and Human Research Studies web page to learn more about how you should or may protect persons (whether vaccinated or unvaccinated) involved in any of your in-person research activities.

Other Information:

You are advised that any modification(s) to the protocol for this project that may alter this exemption determination must be reviewed and approved prior to implementation of the proposed modification(s).

Modifications to the research may invalidate the exemption determination (because the research no longer meets the exemption criteria described in HRP-312 – WORKSHEET – Exemption Determination).

Examples of minor changes to exempt research that would not alter the exemption determination and should therefore not be submitted to the IRB for further review include the following:

- Making administrative (formatting, grammar, spelling) revisions to the protocol, consent or recruitment materials or other study documents
- Adding or revising non-sensitive questions or non-identifiable response options to a survey, interview, focus group or other data collection instrument
- Increasing or decreasing the number of study subjects—unless adding a new study sample such as children or prisoners or adding a new source of data or records
- Making study team/personnel changes—except (1) a change in Principal Investigator (PI) or (2) a change in other study personnel for whom regulatory approval of involvement in the study must be documented for purposes of institutional policy, sponsorship or funding, or other administrative purposes (e.g., graduation or manuscript clearance; addition of non-FSU study personnel).

Examples of changes to exempt research that do require prospectively submitting a modification to the IRB before implementing changes include the following:

- Making substantive revisions or additions (e.g., change in PI; funding source; sample; source of study subjects or their data; study sites or settings; procedures, interventions or interactions with study subjects; use of any drug, device, supplement or biologic; study subjects' time or duration spent performing or participating in study activities) to the protocol, consent or recruitment materials or other study documents
- Adding or revising sensitive questions or identifiable response options to a survey, interview, focus group or other data collection instrument
- Adding a new study sample such as children or prisoners or adding a new source of data or records

- Obtaining, using, studying, analyzing, generating, storing or maintaining identifiable information or identifiable biospecimens in addition to or in lieu of de-identified or anonymous information or specimens
- Change in study risks (e.g., impact upon study subjects; impact upon students' opportunity to learn educational content or assessment of educators who provide instruction; any disclosure of study subjects' responses outside of the research may place study subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement or reputation)
- Change in Principal Investigator (PI) or (for students) faculty advisor
- Any involvement of a non-FSU institution or organization
- New or change in financial interest

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the applicable requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the Library within the RAMP IRB system.

Sincerely,

Office for Human Subjects Protection (OHSP) Florida State University Office of Research 2010
Levy Avenue, Building B Suite 276 Tallahassee, FL 32306-2742
Phone: 850-644-7900
Email: humansubjects@fsu.edu OHSP Web: <https://ohsp.fsu.edu>

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

A. Confirmation of Consent & Reminder of Study Purpose.

- *“Thank you for accepting the invitation to participate in this study. Your experience will be valuable to this research and in helping to understand how student services professionals engage in assessment practices”.* Confidentiality of responses is guaranteed.
- This interview consists of a set of topics and questions that will address the specific activities, processes, and perspectives of your experience as administrator leading assessment practices and making use of data in your department and division.

“Before we begin, do you have any questions? Feel free to stop me any time throughout the interview if questions come up.”

B. Background - Meaning of Data

1. How do you define “data” in your work environment (division of student services/department)?

- i. What type of data is currently being collected?
- ii. Where this data is coming from, and where it is stored?
- iii. Please describe any changes in the type of data that have collected and/or will be collected?

2. Tell me about your current experiences with data sources available to your department/division/institution.

- i. Tell me about your experience managing data.
- ii. Please describe what data sources you use the most.
- iii. Provide examples of institutional data or departmental data used.
- iv. Describe what type of qualitative or quantitative or both data sources do your department currently used.
- v. Please explain how the department make decisions about data collection, analysis, or use. (Who & how)

C. Use of Assessment Data

3. Could you tell me about a time that your department used student assessment data and the purpose of using the data?

- i. What was the outcome of accessing this data? If there is more than one instance, please feel free, could you share 2-3.
- ii. When and why do you use this data for?
 - a. Reporting

- b. Making decisions
- c. Improving practices
- d. identify student's needs, etc.

4. *Please describe what communication channels are used for you and your department for sharing data results and engaging in discussions about using data, if any.*
 - i. When do these discussions happen and how? (Every semester, at the end of the year?)
5. *Please describe your involvement in the Annual Effectiveness Report (AER) of your unit?*
 - i. What specific contributions do you do to this report and/or other documentation.
6. *How have your feelings about using assessment data changed during your years as lead of your unit/department?*

D. Challenges

7. *What kinds of challenges (barriers) do you experience when managing/using data in your department?*
 - i. Procedures
 - ii. Policies
 - iii. Communication channels
 - iv. Time
 - v. Data availability/accessibility
8. *What has been the most helpful situation/experience/training/policy in dealing and/or working with data?*
9. *What has been the biggest impediment on dealing and/or working with data?*
10. *What do you need for the College/Division to support your department in working with data?*

E. Summary & Wrap

- We have discussed the experience of your department/division and your own experience about assessment practices and use of data. I will have some general questions to close this interview if you are okay.

11. *Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in working with data in your department/division?*

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT EMAIL INVITATION

Dear Student Service Director,

My name is Yahemn Baeza, and I am one of your colleagues at SCC. I am at the data collection phase of my dissertation. The aim of this study is to explore how student services personnel define data, their experiences in using data in their departments and any challenges that they might face when working with data. I am writing to invite you to be part of this study. I purposely selected you based on your current or former role as a director-lead of one of the student services departments at SCC, and because you have been in this capacity for at least one year. If you decide to accept to participate in this study, you will be invited to a 30 to 45 minutes interview that will take place personally or via zoom at your earliest convenience. Your involvement in the study is expected to last not more than 60 minutes.

Your participation will be completely voluntary, and all information shared will keep private and confidential. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your anonymity and confidentiality. If you are uncomfortable answering a particular question during the interview, you may abstain answering that question. You may also withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

As a result of taking part in this research, I think that you may have the opportunity to reflect on your own data practices and help improve your department's data-decision making processes. Likewise, your responses will help scholars and administrators develop an understanding of the factors that help and hinder the use of data by student services personnel in ways that are conducive to student success in college.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Please confirm your participation by replying to this email.

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of the Study: *Data-Driven Decision-Making Practices: An Exploratory Case Study of the Division of Student Affairs at a Community College.*

Principal Investigator: Yahemn Baeza, Ed.D. Student, Florida State University

Faculty Advisor: Bradley Cox, Associate Professor and Program Coordinator, Higher Education, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department, Florida State University

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Please find below information about this research for you to think about before you decide to take part. Ask us if you have any questions about this information or the research before you decide to take part.

Key Information for You to Consider

Statement of the Research Study. You are being invited to volunteer to take part in our research study. It is up to you whether you choose to take part or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to you if you choose not to take part or decide later not to take part.

Purpose. The reason that we are doing this research is to learn about the data practices by student services personnel, particularly how they define data, what type of data they use and the purpose of it, and the challenges they face when engaging in data practices.

Duration. We think that taking part in our study will last 3 months.

Research Activities. You will be asked to answer approximately 10 interview questions in person and/or virtually.

Risks: The risks or discomforts to you of taking part in this study include the possibility of feeling uncomfortable when answering some questions. On these occasions, you may decide to abstain from answering the question and/or stop the interview session.

Benefits: As a result of taking part in this research, we think that you may reflect on your own data practices and help improve your department's data-decision making activities. Your responses will help scholars and administrators develop an understanding of the factors that help and hinder the use of data by student services personnel in ways that are conducive to student success in college.

What is this study about?

Researchers at Florida State University are studying data-driven decision-making practices in higher education. Researchers are interested in finding out how student services personnel understand and define data, the type of data practices they engage, and the challenges that they face when engaging in data practices. You are invited to take part in the study because you are one of the college-wide administrative leads from one of the student services departments at your institution and you have been in this capacity for at least one year. Consequently, you are

one of the 16 persons to take part in this study. Your involvement in the study is expected to last not more than 60 minutes.

What will happen during this research?

If you agree to be in this research, your participation will include the participation of a 30-45 interview session.

- The interview protocol will ask a series of questions about your experience with data in your department and data practices that can contribute to the department's decision-making process.
- The interview will be audio recorded with your permission. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the anonymity and confidentiality.
- You will have the option to opt-out of the audio and/or video recording at any time during the interview process.
- You may be contacted during transcription and/or analysis to ensure accuracy.

We will tell you about any new information that may affect your willingness to continue to take part in this research.

You may not be made aware of some features about the study, such as its exact purpose, study questions and materials, or your responses that we would like to collect. At the end of your participation in this study or if you withdraw from this study, we will provide you with additional information.

What will you do to protect my privacy?

The results of the study may be published or presented, but no information that may identify you will ever be provided or released in publications or presentations. We will take steps to protect your privacy and confidentiality. These steps include replacing the subjects' names with pseudonyms to avoid the use of the participants' names. The de-identification will occur as soon as possible during the interview and/or transcripts process. All information will be considered confidential, secured, and stored in the researcher's personal password-protected computer. Despite taking steps to protect your privacy or the confidentiality of your identifiable information, we cannot guarantee that your privacy or confidentiality will be protected. For example, if you tell us something that makes us believe that you or others have been or may be physically harmed, we may need to report that information to the appropriate agencies.

Individuals and organizations responsible for conducting or monitoring this research may be permitted access to and inspect the research records. This includes the Florida State University Institutional Review Board (FSU IRB), which reviewed this study.

If identifiers are removed from your identifiable private information that are collected during this research, that de-identified information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without your additional informed consent.

What are the risks of harms or discomforts associated with this research?

The risks of harms or discomforts associated with the research are minimal. You may feel uncomfortable when answering some questions. On these occasions, you may decide to abstain from answering the question and/or stop the interview session.

In addition to the risks of these harms or discomforts, this research may have risks of harms or discomforts that are unknown at this time. If in the future we become aware of any additional harms or discomforts that may affect you, we will tell you.

How might I benefit from this research?

Personal benefits you may get from this study are the opportunity to self-reflect on data practices that may help improve your department’s data-decision making processes. Your responses will help scholars, and administrators develop their understanding of the factors that help and hinder the use of data by student services personnel in ways conducive to student success in college.

What is the compensation for the research?

You will not receive any compensation for your participation in this study.

What will happen if I choose not to participate?

It is your choice to participate or not to participate in this research. Participation is voluntary.

Is my participation voluntary, and can I withdraw?

Taking part in this research study is your decision. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, but if you do, you can stop at any time. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with the researcher, Florida State University, and Community College. There are no consequences to which you are otherwise entitled if you do not participate.

You have the right to choose not to participate in any study activity or completely withdraw from continued participation at any point in this study without consequences to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you withdraw from the study, the data collected to the point of withdrawal will be kept and used in an aggregate analysis.

Who do I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions, concerns, or have experienced a research-related injury, contact the research team at:

Mrs. Yahemn Baeza

Dr. Bradley Cox, Ph. D.
(850) 644-6446
bcox2@fsu.edu

The Florida State University Institutional Review Board (“IRB”) is overseeing this research. The FSU IRB is a group of people who perform official independent review of research studies before studies begin to ensure that the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you have questions about your rights or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Florida State University IRB
2010 Levy Drive, Suite 276
Tallahassee, Florida 32306
850-644-7900
humansubjects@fsu.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read and considered the information presented in this form. I confirm that I understand the purpose of the research and the study procedures. I understand that I may ask questions at any time and can withdraw my participation without prejudice. I have read this consent form. My signature below indicates my willingness to participate in this study.

I consent to participate in this study.

Printed Name of Adult Participant

Signature of Adult Participant

Date

I agree to be audiotaped

YES (initial) _____ NO (initial) _____

I agree to be videotaped

YES (initial) _____ NO (initial) _____

Researcher’s Signature

I have fully explained the research study described by this form. I have answered the participant and/or parent/guardians’ questions and will answer any future questions to the best of my ability. I will tell the family and/or the person taking part in this research of any changes in the procedures or in the possible harms/possible benefits of the study that may affect their health or their willingness to stay in the study.

Printed Name of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

Signature of Research Team Member

Date

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Yahemn Baeza completed her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Administration at Florida State University. She holds a Master in Higher Education Administration from Florida International University and a Master in the Human Development from Universidad del Norte, Colombia. She also completed a B.S. in Psychology from Universidad del Norte, Colombia.

Yahemn has more than 15 years of professional experience in higher education from Colombia and in the States. She has created and coordinated extra-curricular programs to improve research skills for undergraduate and graduate students. She has supported faculty, administrators, and student affairs personnel in developing research proposals, assessment plans, and survey development. Currently, Yahemn is a Senior Assessment and Evaluation Associate in a South County College in South Florida. In her current position she is responsible for managing college wide surveys and student feedback for faculty.

Her academic interest lies in studying the effectiveness of higher education, with a special focus on evaluating processes and strategies to better respond to changing policies and current issues posed by the higher education system.