



President's Message

Greetings CIRPA Members to our first 2015 newsletter.

Our newsletter editors Emily Roscoe (University of Manitoba) and Elisa Allegro (University of Manitoba) have been working hard to bring you interesting and informative content.

It was great to see so many of you at our annual conference in Hamilton. Our thanks to our Conference Co-Chairs Carmelinda Del Conte (Mohawk College) and John Dube (McMaster University) and their teams for planning a wonderful and diverse conference. Thanks to those members who volunteered to be on the Program Committee, Local Arrangements Committee, and to all of you who presented and facilitated. It was definitely a team effort! Our 2015 conference will be in Halifax (read further in the newsletter and soon on the website for more details from Conference Co-Chairs Yuqin Gong (University of Prince Edward Island) and Aimee Lyons (St. Francis Xavier University)).

We had some changes to the Board and would like to thank Luc Simon (Université Laval), Jennifer Murray (Dalhousie University), and Brian Beacham (Vancouver Community College) for their contributions to CIRPA. We are also pleased to welcome Stephanie McKeown (University of British Columbia), Garry Hansen (St. Thomas University), and Randy Roller (University of Manitoba)—some further insights into these marvelous people can be found later in this newsletter.

So, what has the CIRPA Board been up to?

A major project over the last number of years has been attending to our information systems, including online elections, purchases, conference registration, and membership tracking. We have come a long way, but realize there is more we can do, therefore this work continues.

As a Board, we are beginning the process to update our strategic plan. This will include consultations with the CIRPA membership in order to update the strategic plan by 2016.

A subcommittee of the Board is also working on a Board Governance Framework, to provide documentation and succession planning as our Board changes. We also anticipate that this document will be used to help recruit new Board members and orient them to the activities of the Board.

Professional development opportunities for our members are still a major focus. Our annual conference continues to be well attended, and provides professional development opportunities to new and returning members. In addition, through our affiliation with the Association for Institutional Research (AIR), we now provide a travel grant for one CIRPA member to attend AIR's annual forum. This year we asked interested members to put their names in for a lottery. Shane Simpson of Mount Royal University was the lucky winner. Shane will receive money from AIR and CIRPA to help with travel expenses. In exchange, Shane will share his experiences and lessons learned at AIR with us via the CIRPA Newsletter. The Board is also looking at alternative methods of awarding this travel grant, such as making this an award for the best paper at our annual conference and negotiating with AIR for that best paper to be presented at their forum. We will keep you posted on these developments.

Lastly, I welcome all CIRPA members to join our LinkedIn group or use our listserv to share knowledge (such as upcoming professional development opportunities), ask questions, and post job opportunities. Also, if you would like to volunteer to help out (as Morgan Blair from Medicine Hat College did when she offered to write an article for this newsletter), contact me, or any Board members, or our **newsletter editors**. Your contributions help keep CIRPA successful.

Many thanks!

Sharon Schultz, President

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Getting to Know the CIRPA Board of Directors

Congratulations to our newly appointed Board Members Garry Hansen, Stephanie McKeown, and Randy Roller!

We asked new Board members the following questions to get to know them better:

Q1: What do you love most about your job?

Q2: What is the best advice you have received or given about working in Institutional Research/Planning?

Q3: What has been your most positive experience with CIRPA?

Q4: How would you explain what you do for a living to someone who is not familiar with Institutional Research/Planning?

Aimee Lyons, Conference Co-Chair (St. Francis Xavier University)

A1: My favorite aspect of working in IR is the always changing work. So often there are new and exciting things to explore, whether it's with methodology, technology, or just new research in general. Another thing I love is providing data to drive decision-making. Knowing the work I do can positively and directly impact university operations and the student's experience is very rewarding!

A2: The best advice I have been given about IR is that there is no one perfect way of doing things. There are many different methods that can produce the same results and each of those methods has their benefits. It is up to us as IR professionals to be able to match the methodology with the task at hand. Another bit of advice that I consider important is to never stay stagnant in processes, not to be afraid of change, and thinking outside of the box.

A3: My most positive experience with CIRPA has been the relationships I have built with other IR professionals. As a one-man-show, I sometimes depend on the experiences and advice of others when working on tasks or projects. It was events like CIRPA conferences that helped build and bridge these relationships.

A4: I basically say that I am everything surveys and non-finance numbers related. I provide data to the executive decision-makers.

Yuqin Gong, Conference Co-Chair (University of Prince Edward Island)

A1: I love the profession because what we do matters in direct and concrete ways. All, or at least most, of the work we do will be used by someone in his or her decision-making process and will likely make a difference.

A2: A colleague shared with me the best advice he has received and it is "do not just be a data provider". The longer I am in the profession, the more I appreciate the wisdom in this advice.



CIRPA Board of Directors

Top (left to right): Sonia Richards, Randy Roller, Luc Simon, Mike Krywy, Jamie Graham
Bottom (left to right): Stephanie McKeown, Miranda Pearson, Sharon Shultz, Garry Hansen, Jennifer Murray

A3: Networking with and learning from colleagues. Attending CIRPA conferences has always been something to look forward to for. Getting involved with conference planning is fun and provides more opportunities to get to know the organization and colleagues better. It also, I have to admit, makes me more appreciative of the work the Executive Board members and other volunteers do to keep the organization running and to organize the annual conferences. It instills positive energy in me for my work and my profession.

A4: I always say "I am in a profession called Institutional Research/Planning, which is basically educational research but primarily focuses on and serves one particular institution in various aspects of the institution's decision-making and planning".

Garry Hansen, Member-at-Large (St. Thomas University)

A1: The detective work. There's something immensely satisfying about using data to solve a puzzle.

A2: Not everything that can be measured is important, and not everything that is important can be measured. Always keep your research question in mind.

A3: I was impressed and gratified with the way in which my Atlantic colleagues came together to help organize the CIRPA 2011 conference in Fredericton. That was true collegiality.

A4: My facetious answer is, "I count students". The long version is, "My three areas of responsibility are providing statistical and analytical support for the senior administration, non-financial external reporting, and data integrity". By then, their eyes have usually glazed over.

**Randy Roller, Member-at-Large
(University of Manitoba)**

A1: For me it is helping other people understand how the information generated can help direct their decisions, and seeing those decisions improve the institution.

A2: Don't be afraid to ask a question. Ask questions about what you are doing, how you are doing it, and what the results mean.

A3: I had the opportunity to attend a CIRPA conference the first year that I started in the Office of Institutional Analysis at the University of Manitoba. I think the best part of that experience was getting to know those that were new to this type of work, like me, and seeing the scope of what was being done in this area at other institutions.

A4: I work at the University of Manitoba and provide information about the institution to the senior administration, government, and the general public regarding student, staff, and finances. OR...I'm a data detective!

For a full listing of CIRPA's current Board of Directors or to contact the Board, please see the website cirpa-acpri.ca (More Q&A responses can be found in the June 2014 Newsletter.)

2014 Best Practice Award Recipient

Congratulations to the Institutional Research team at NAIT (Northern Alberta Institute of Technology), recipients of the Best Practice Award!

In 2013, the Institutional Research team at the (NAIT) completed the installation of a data visualization software package. They began this process in 2007 with the piloting of a desktop version of the software, which eventually lead to the 'soft launch' of the enterprise level of the program. By using a slow-staged launch of the system, it allowed individuals to train on the software in a controlled way, thus reducing the stress on the team. There were a number of positive outcomes, including more people being able to access the data within the institution, greater efficiency in answering data questions, and the realization that the implementation and use of the software has not significantly increased the demands on the team. By learning from the experience at NAIT, this can be used as an example for other small-scale IR offices when implementing data visualization software.

*Nominations for Best Practice and Outstanding Service awards can be made by any current member of CIRPA and submitted to the Board of Directors through the President. The deadline for nomination is June 30th, 2015. For more information on past winners, see the **Members** section of the CIRPA website.*

Member Article: Retention Among Canadian College Students

**by Morgan Blair
Director—Strategic Research and Analysis
(Medicine Hat College)**

I recently graduated from the University of Calgary with a Doctorate in Higher Education Leadership. The focus of my research was to estimate the rate of within-year retention among a sample of students attending two comprehensive community colleges in western Canada, and to develop a predictive model that could identify potential determinants of retention among these students. This article provides a brief description of this research.

Estimates in the literature for within-year retention at two-year colleges range from 57% to 83.9%^{1,2,3,4}, indicating that a large proportion of students who attend two-year colleges may not be retained beyond the first semester of their studies. However, a gap exists in the research literature on the predictors of retention at community colleges, specifically in the Canadian context. Differences between the American and Canadian systems, and differences between college and university students, necessitate that retention be examined from a Canadian perspective for Canadian colleges.

A secondary analysis of data that included information on student demographic, lifestyle, academic, and financial factors was conducted, with data sourced from institutional research offices at two community colleges. Retention was examined among the total sample, among the sample from each college separately, and among the sample enrolled in each credential type (certificate/diploma, university transfer, and upgrading/non-parchment). Multivariable logistic regression was used to develop predictive models of college student retention, controlling for age and gender. The results were considered through the lens of Astin's^{5,6} Institution-Environment-Output model, which suggests that institutional outputs (such as retention) must be evaluated in the context of the original student inputs and ongoing environmental factors.

Despite vast demographic differences between the samples of students attending the two colleges, the retention rate did not differ by institution (overall retention rate = 83.6%). However, differences were observed by credential type: students enrolled in university transfer (88.0%) and parchment programs (86.3%) were far more likely to be retained than students enrolled in upgrading/non-parchment programs (72.0%).

Multivariable Estimate of Retention in the Aggregate Model^a

Covariates	n (%)	Adjusted OR (95% CI)	p-value
Student Input Covariates			
Gender			
Male	219 (81.1)	1.00	
Female	483 (68.6)	0.72 (0.45, 1.12)	0.148
Age			
≤20	351 (81.6)	1.35 (0.89, 2.05)	0.155
>20	351 (81.6)	1.00	
Environmental Covariates			
Credit Load			
Part-time status	582 (91.1)	1.00	
Full-time status	120 (54.0)	5.92 (3.91, 8.98)	0.000
GPA			
Below 50 th percentile	300 (73.4)	1.00	
Above 50 th percentile	400 (93.5)	4.10 (2.57, 6.55)	0.000

Note. OR=odds ratio; CI=confidence interval; GPA=grade point average.

^an=837

The predictors of retention were also similar for students attending each college. The overall results indicated that retention was most strongly predicted by full-time credit load and having a GPA above the 50th percentile. Students enrolled full-time and those with a higher GPA were the most likely to be retained. Certain sub-groups of students may also exist for whom the dynamics of retention are unique. Among university transfer students, not working at a job while in college increased the odds of retention. Among students enrolled in upgrading/non-parchment programs, retention was predicted by goal commitment. The overall trends between models can provide useful information regarding the student input and environmental factors that predicted retention. Although many student input factors were considered for inclusion in the models, all failed to remain significant in the final models. This suggests that environmental factors mainly predicted retention among this sample of Canadian college students.

These results can be used to inform institutional policy and practice, and thereby help to guide the allocation of

resources towards strategies that may produce the greatest return on investment (in terms of improved retention). From an institutional perspective, implementing policies and practices (possibly through strategic enrolment management processes) aimed at encouraging full-time enrolment and supporting students' academic performance may increase retention rates in the future.

1. Vorhees, R. A. (1987). *Toward building models of community college persistence: A logistic analysis*. *Review of Higher Education*, 26 (2), 115–29.
2. Cofer, J., & Somers, P. A. (1997, October). *Mortgaging their future: Debtload and undergraduate persistence*. Paper presented at the Association for the Study of Higher Education Annual Meeting, Albuquerque, NM.
3. Hippensteel, D. G., St. John, E. P., & Starkey, J. B. (1996). *Influence of tuition and student aid on within-year persistence by adults in 2-year colleges*. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 20, 233–242.
4. St. John, E. P., & Starkey, J. B. (1994). *The influence of costs on persistence by traditional college-age students in community colleges*. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 18, 201–213.
5. Astin, A.W. (1975). *Preventing students from dropping out*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
6. Astin, A.W. (1984). *Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education*. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25, 297-308.

Have an idea or article for the next CIRPA Newsletter?

We would love to hear from you!

Article submission deadline is April 30, 2015 for the June 2015 publication.

Contact cirpa.editors@gmail.com.

Reflections on the 2014 CIRPA conference

By Teresa Chernecki (University of Manitoba)

I should start by disclosing that I am new to IR. As this article was being written, I was celebrating my fourth month on the job. While well acquainted with research and data, the realm of IR was something entirely different. In what was my first month as a Research Analyst with the Office of Institutional Analysis, I attended my first CIRPA conference in Hamilton, Ontario (October 2014) with my teammates from the University of Manitoba, Office of Institutional Analysis: Thelma Lussier – Executive Director, Randy Roller – Assistant Director, and Wen Trask – Senior Research Analyst.

While having attended many conferences in the past, I have to say that the 2014 CIRPA Hamilton conference was well organized and thoughtfully planned. The keynote and plenary speakers were engaging and interesting, and there were many breakout sessions to choose from. The main venue for the event was well laid out, and several sessions so popular that attendees were bursting through the doors. It took a while to get used to the combination of both college- and university-led sessions, and to decide which of the topics would provide the most applicable information back at the office. The vendor and supplier booths gave a good overview of some of the products and programs available. As Thelma Lussier put it, “The booths are excellent for people who are new to the field... They give good overall orientation information and context”. I would say that, for me, one of the highlights was going to Thelma’s presentation *Succession Planning: One University’s Experience*, as it provided answers to so many of the questions I had about IR, and acted as a Coles’ notes version of how our office operates and as an overview of where we fit in the grand scheme of things.

The President’s Reception provided ample opportunity to mingle with friends old and new. It was great to chat to some of the new friends who I met at the conference, while flagging down the yummy tapas type foods that kept passing by on trays. Randy Roller, the new Webmaster and Member-at-Large for the CIRPA Board of Directors, also described the conference as having “A record number of delegates making for a good opportunity to network



Performers *Andre & the J Tones* at the Canadian War Plane Museum

with both new and returning colleagues”.

The Canadian War Plane Museum was fantastic and made for an exotic excursion. It began with an old school bus trip up the mountainside, as CIRPA members were transported to our destination. At arrival we were able to walk around the planes utilizing individualized tour-guiding services, making for a unique experience. Wen Trask seconded my awe of the museum, stating, “I really enjoyed the war plane museum. The cool part was knowing that the vast majority of planes are in flying condition. They weren’t just relics that they dragged from somewhere. That to me spoke to the passion of the people who spend their time there”. The photo booth made for some interesting group photos, and the night was capped off with an excellent band and a few spins on the dance floor.

After attending the 2014 CIRPA conference I can say that I really started to understand the basic concepts behind the profession: I didn’t have to know everything, I just had to be willing to learn. We all came from different places, with different degrees and areas of experience. After talking with others in attendance, I left the conference feeling less alone. The 2014 CIRPA conference was an amazing and unique experience and I can’t wait to learn what I don’t know I don’t know.



CIRPA Conference 2015

Mark your calendars for the 24th annual CIRPA conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia from October 25-27, 2015! Keep your eye on the CIRPA website for more details including theme, speakers and official Call for Proposals.