

Institutional Research and Reporting Services

Client **Columbus State University**
A comprehensive university within the University System of Georgia



Challenge Develop a more efficient and user-friendly method for delivering institutional data to the user community.

COLUMBUS STATE
UNIVERSITY

When Timothy S. Mescon became President of Columbus State University in July 2008, one of his first initiatives was to improve the school's Institutional Research (IR) program. "The quality, accuracy and timeliness of data, data retrieval and data warehousing are very important in a turbulent, competitive decision-making environment," says Mescon. To get his program where it needed to be, he made one call to Debbie Head, a 25+ year IR veteran who was an independent consultant at the time. Head has since joined IData as a senior IR consultant (October 2009). "Calling Debbie to evaluate and rebuild our program was the best call I made," Mescon adds.

Solution

Following an on-site assessment of the IR program, which Head completed in 2.5 days, she embarked upon a six-month engagement to rebuild the program. This included analyzing processes for storing, retrieving, requesting and receiving data, as well as interviewing IR "customers" across campus. The goals were to:

- Deliver data in a more user-friendly and accessible manner (the CSU Fact Book was only available in PDF format and was cumbersome to find and use on the website)
- Expand the types of data included (e.g. graduation and retention rates) as required for reporting
- Provide immediate access to statistics (e.g. number of degrees conferred by degree and major by year, headcount and FTE enrollment over the past five years) to compare to current data

Facilitating teamwork: Ensuring that critical needs would be effectively served by the new program required high levels of interaction with a diverse group of stakeholders from IR, Computer and Network Services, Academic Affairs and Student Enrollment Services. "It takes incredibly strong interpersonal skills to effectively interact with this level and diversity of faculty and staff," Mescon observes. "A key to Debbie's consulting success was having the strong technical and interpersonal skills, as well as more than 25 years of experience working in the university environment."

Quick-turn technology: To meet the accelerated timeframe as well as budget and resource constraints, the new data delivery system was developed using XML, HTML, and Fusion Charts from data extracts in a very small localized data mart. This localized data mart utilized census data and other denormalized data from Oracle tables, Access databases and Excel spreadsheets.

Results

"Debbie completed the project on time and just did a stunning job," Mescon explains. CSU now has a strong, documented IR function that can be turned over to a new director of IR. The interactive Fact Book now offers predetermined selection criteria (e.g. term, year, college and program, etc.) as well as verified and official data, graphs and tables. It serves as an internal resource for campus users that need data for federal, state, accrediting and other reports. Another benefit of the engagement was increased exposure of all stakeholders to the functions and services of the IR office, which had been little known around campus.

IData Incorporated

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