

Useful Programmatic Data: Cultivating Information to Support Strategic Decision-Making

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Big Data, analytics, and uncovering hidden correlations are but the latest expression of elements of data assessment that have been important before the last generation of terms. Knowledge management, data mining, and knowledge discovery were fashionable terms in the 1990s and into the 2000s, and there will likely be new emergent revisions of these terms offered again. Yet there is value in articulating the insights revealed through analysis of programmatic and institutional data. Whatever the hype, investigation of records yields insights from uncovering unseen correlations, exposing oversights, and inviting further investigation.

While such data sets may fall far short of what current vogue names Big Data, these institutionally-generated datasets are nevertheless worthy of attention and analysis. This presentation articulates those data points that were useful in running and repeating institutional analysis of a professional and technical writing program and supported the creation of information from this ambient data. The presentation is designed to invite discussion and inquiry among administrators interested in using existing assessment practices as well as those considering creating contextually appropriate processes. The presentation is designed to help administrators use data to support arguments that are valued by internal and external stakeholders while being mindful of the challenges any kind of outside mandated assessment brings to programmatic evaluation, as articulated by Denny (2008).

The approach is based on participatory assessment as articulated by Salvo and Ren (2007) as "characterized by negotiation and dialog among various internal stakeholders, including students, administrators, faculty and instructors." Challenges of naming and inviting participants and stakeholders are discussed, as are challenges of both data gathering and data analysis. The speaker is prepared to discuss some basics of information processing during the discussion period in order to orient the audience to some of the more accessible data available to program administrators as well as to more esoteric data. As the title implies, the heuristic of determining which data sets to include will be judged on usefulness in supporting and strengthening representations of scientific and technical communication programs. Further, discussion can be encouraged around articulating assessment practices that incorporate programmatic data at a variety of institutional contexts.

Thematically, rhetorical use of data to best represent the work of technical and scientific communication will be the focus of the presentation, as will the use of data and data analysis to strengthen ethos of those reporting program identity. Speaking from the perspective of a second-generation assessment, the presentation is designed to support others looking to include effective data analytics into programmatic, institutional and extra-institutional assessment and communication about programmatic assessment and development. Attendees will be encouraged to articulate sources of data they may have overlooked but are already available to them both through institutional partners, staff, faculty, instructors, and students.

References

Denny, Harry. Dangerous liaisons: Reflections on a pilot project for state-mandated outcomes

assessment of written communication. *Assessing Writing*. Volume 13, Issue 1, 2008, Pages 26–44.

Salvo, Michael J. and Ren, Jingfang. Participatory Assessment: Negotiating Engagement in a Technical Communication Program. *Technical Communication*, Volume 54, Number 4, November 2007, pp. 424-439.