

# Session Recap: A Conversation About Data Literacy

## Session Topic

Data literacy can mean many things to many people. What's your definition and how do you work to promote it on campus? During this roundtable discussion, we explored the challenges to building greater literacy among campus stakeholders while sharing and brainstorming additional strategies to promote greater comfort with data.

## Definition of "Data Literacy" and Being "Data Literate"

### ▶ Data Literacy

- The translation of data into accessible information, within the appropriate context
- Deriving actionable insights and themes
- Asking the right questions
- Coming to the data with a problem space in mind, and using it to support a coherent argument
- Aligning data use to strategic priorities
- Evaluating data for quality through validation, and recommending improvements when needed
- Understanding when something is possible versus impossible, and the inherent limitations of the available data

### ▶ Being Data Literate

- Basic statistical understanding
- Functional understanding of data definitions within the unit of interest (e.g., Financial Aid)
- Understanding the data source, assumptions, and methodology
- Showing no fear in approaching data
- Presenting data in ways that others can understand
- Understanding when not to follow what the data says
- Understands why data is relevant to them and finds data to be necessary for making decisions
- **Being data literate is a spectrum, not binary**

## Challenges and Solutions in Building Data Literacy on Campus

### ▶ Challenges

- Resistant leadership, naysayers
- Lack of common and transparent data definitions
- Staff time for going to trainings and engaging in these conversations
- Administrator time for leading the trainings and strategically communicating about the data
- Unclear who's job the training should be, especially if the Institutional Research office is not equipped to be more involved in this effort
- Creating openness to the discussion, avoiding fear, and avoiding the feeling like "it is personal"
- Push to always boil insights down into bite-size "bumper stickers", which makes explaining the insights difficult
- Over-reliance on jargon, not engaging in deeper conversations
- Managing official locations of data and holding stakeholders on campus accountable to using those (i.e., not storing data on their desktop)
- Culture not adapted yet to using data to make decisions, so the newness of it becomes overwhelming

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### ► Solutions

- **Embed teachings about data literacy into ongoing initiatives**, by discussing data, explaining methodologies, and diving deeper into the context. Initiatives could be a strategic enrollment management plan or implementing a new reporting system.
- Create a **data dictionary of common data definitions** and publish widely to increase transparency and understanding.
- **Hire a data-savvy faculty member** into your student success (or other) office to lead these efforts. Because this individual comes from the faculty, they may be able to quickly build trust, present data in a consumable and easy to understand manner, engage in the hard conversations, and be more objective.
- **Empower the Institutional Research (IR) office to serve as trainers and champions** for data literacy. Examples of activities that IR could own include the following:
  - Host **monthly brown bag lunches** in which IR helps individuals work through problems, educates on certain topics, or answer questions.
  - Host a **"Data and Donuts"** session on specific topics of interest to your campus. Encourage prior registration so that IR can come to that session with data geared towards specific individuals and their units.
  - **Meet with every Dean to better understand how they want to leverage the APS platform.** Ask what questions they seek to answer from the tool, as well as what they want their department chairs to know. Use this information to inform the topics for your scheduled training sessions, such as the brown bags or "Data and Donuts" mentioned above ^.
- **Dedicate an analyst**, either within IR or not, to certain functional areas.
- **Focus engagement and training on those who ask for the most data**, thereby educating your repeat customers and building champions across campus.
- **Emphasize the need for building context into a data analysis by putting the reporting in the hands of those within the local units.** For example, require that Dept. Chairs complete the annual program reviews, rather than Institutional Research, because they can add context to the numbers.
- **Require approval through IR of any externally reported data points** to ensure proper validation and context.
- Form **"squads" of cross-functional teams** that meet regularly (i.e., bi-weekly) to discuss data around specific topics, like student enrollment
- With access to new data sources and the increased emphasis on data-informed decisions, there will likely be an **increase in demand for support** from IR and other analysts on campus. Manage this influx through the following:
  - **Automation of reports** wherever possible
  - **Using tools like APS** to provide the information
  - **Require action plans** for every request to detail the needs (provide support in creating these where needed)

► If you have additional solutions to building data literacy and would like to contribute to this list, please contact your Dedicated Consultant.

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## Further Reading

- APS Toolkit: <https://eab.com/insights/toolkit/operations/8-strategies-to-engage-academic-leaders-with-aps-data/>
- EAB Blog Post: <https://eab.com/insights/blogs/student-success/6-common-barriers-to-using-data-for-student-success-management/>
- EAB Blog Post: <https://eab.com/insights/blogs/student-success/data-literacy-and-student-success/>
- ITF Data Governance Center of Excellence: <https://eab.com/research/it/resource-center/data-governance-center-of-excellence/>
- Gartner, A Data and Analytics Leader's Guide to Data Literacy: <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/a-data-and-analytics-leaders-guide-to-data-literacy/>
- Oceans of Data Institute, Building Global Interest in Data Literacy: A Dialogue: [http://oceansofdata.org/sites/oceansofdata.org/files/ODI%20Data%20Literacy%20Report\\_0.pdf](http://oceansofdata.org/sites/oceansofdata.org/files/ODI%20Data%20Literacy%20Report_0.pdf)
- Qlik, Developing a Data Literate Workforce: A Strategy and Framework for the Enterprise: <https://www.qlik.com/us/-/media/files/resource-library/global-us/register/whitepapers/wp-developing-a-data-literate-workforce-en.pdf>

## Contact the Session Facilitators!

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