BC Student Outcomes

Strategic Plan Update 2014

Operational Directions 2013 – 2016

1. Data Collection

It is imperative to keep the surveys as short and as user-friendly as possible to ensure continued high response rates. However more information about the student experience in and out of school is desired. As well, there are opportunities to refine cohort submission procedures. Lastly, mobile technology is a factor that needs to be embraced.

   a. Surveys have core annual questions, rotating occasional questions, and with funding opportunities, one time questions.
      i. Expand this approach from DACSO to other surveys
      ii. Seek greater alignment in question formats across surveys
   b. Coordinate with other provincial data sets
      i. Determine the linkages that exist with Student Transitions Project and CDW.
      ii. Explore the privacy implication of linking various data sources
      iii. Find a group to lead the development of a strategy for surveying current students: e.g. a cycle that alternates CCSSE/NSSE or CUSC with an institution-developed survey
   c. Modernize cohort definition
      i. Because of student mobility between institutions, programs, and sectors, is there an opportunity to reconceptualise cohorts from the perspective of the entire educational system
   d. Technology
      i. Continue to adapt surveys from an audio environment to a visual environment for on-line and mobile users.

2. Dissemination of Results

The current reporting tools are aging and need to be reconsidered. As well, there is a low-level of awareness of the survey results outside of institutional and Ministry users. Greater awareness would improve the ability of the project to attract research partners and possible funding sources.

   e. More integrated results across surveys for better alignment of results for users
   f. Less costly SORS and/or alternative reporting tool(s) and consider an option that increases access to the non-IR community.

g. More graphic/visual presentations to supplement tabular data
h. In addition to current formats designed to support accountability, quality assurance, and program improvement initiatives, address how the student outcomes results can meet the needs of students for educational planning.
    i. Identify groups that influence students' educational choices (e.g. high school teachers, counsellors, academic advisors, job search counsellors, career centres, etc.) and develop strategies for making information available to them.
i. Strengthen brand, e.g. more intuitive name than "outcomes" and more accurate name than "graduate survey"

3. Infrastructure/Administration

j. Reduce overhead needed to support committee work
k. Refine Forum structure
    i. Establish Research and Analysis Committee
    ii. Streamline/reduce other committees
l. Stabilize funding

Appendices:

A. Environmental Scan
B. Highlights from Previous Strategic Plan

Appendix A: Environmental Scan

STRENGTHS

1. Results serve both local (detailed) and high level (summary) audiences, i.e., program review within institutions through to system accountability and labour market planning.
   > *Implications: Challenge of providing data at different levels for different audiences.*
   > *Must understand the various stakeholders' needs before considering any significant changes to the project.*
2. Project provides robust, comparable, easy-to-understand time series data that can be accessed through a variety of reporting tools and reports: SORS, SORS Lite, Education Planner, Career Cruising, Career Pathfinder, analytical reports, highlights, and topic papers.
   > *Implications: Need to ensure high quality both in data collection and data dissemination*
3. Questionnaire Design: Similar surveys across four very different cohorts with some customized questions in each survey.
   > *Implications: Allows for the comparison of experiences and outcomes of the various segments of the student population.*
4. A well administered project that has adapted over the years: more surveys, different data collection methodologies, different project administration, streamlining of questionnaires, similarities across surveys for very different groups of students.
   > *Implications: Need to guard against inertia. Challenge of handling new and additional aspects of surveying and reporting with limited resources.*
5. Good collaboration: A good cross-section of volunteers from various institutions who gain experience and become good committee members.
   > *Implications: Need to be intentional about including all institutions, developing new people, and ensuring good communication among committees.*

WEAKNESSES

1. Questionnaire Design:
   a) Adapting to technology change—improving the web survey, testing and adapting survey for handheld devices—is resource intensive.
   b) Survey length is now under 14 minutes on average to complete on telephone, but is still long.
      > *Implications: Consider data on where student abandon surveys in any redesign of the surveys.*
   c) Harmonization issues: Despite a high level of comparability across the surveys, there are a number of questions that appear similar but differences in cohorts, question wording or response scales make comparisons problematic.
      > *Implications: Need to balance improving the survey with maintaining the time series, and balance the ability to aggregate or compare data with customizing for the particular characteristics of cohorts.*
2. Scope and criteria for cohort selection :

a) Time and cost of complex cohort selection criteria for DACSO institutions
b) Differences in cohort selection practices across institutions for DACSO and APPSO
c) Difficulty explaining multiple cohort selection criteria across surveys to external audiences
d) "System" students who take courses at more than one institution may be missed or may be double surveyed.

> *Implications: Need to ensure processes still serve all of us well, e.g., the challenge of improving and simplifying cohort selection processes while maintaining consistency and accuracy.*

3. Reporting and analysis:
    a) Partial baccalaureate graduates data available in reporting tool (SORS)
    b) Analysis and building of a cumulative knowledge base is a bit ad hoc (series of one-time, hot topics papers)

    > *Implications: Need to explore research and reporting options while drawing our most recent results to the attention of new audiences,*

    c) Need to balance a long term research agenda with responsiveness to emerging issues.
    d) Information Sharing Agreements sometimes limit reporting options

4. Missing outcomes data from some groups of students who are not surveyed annually:
    a) International students
    b) Graduate students (masters and doctorates)
    c) Short stay/early leavers, applied and bachelor degree "near completers"
    d) Research university diplomas and certificates
    e) Certificate and diploma graduates five years out

    > *Implications: Need to balance including more students with existing resources*

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Ubiquitous communications technology: Email, cell phones, smart phones, and tablets make it easier for respondents to access the surveys

    > *Implications: Data collection methodologies need to be constantly updated in a thoughtful, sustainable manner for surveys to be adaptable to the various mediums, while maintaining accessibility for those who don't have up-to-date technology.*

2. Reporting and analysis:
    a) Lots of analytical possibilities/gold mine of data available (e.g., connecting outcomes data with other databases).

    > *Implication: How might our data be offered to graduate students for research and theses?*

    b) Different types of reporting for different audiences

    > *Implications: Challenge of finding resources and cost-effective processes for more analysis and reporting.*

3. Other related data initiatives: STP for mobility among institutions, CDW for additional cohorts' selection

    > *Implications: How do we complement and not duplicate efforts? How can we benefit from the work of these projects?*

4. Proposed quality assurance framework for all postsecondary sectors mentions the student experience as one of four quality dimensions.

    Implications: Potential to expand outcomes surveying to private institutions.

5. Succession planning: Encourage long time committee members to mentor new committee members or help existing committee members to move into leadership roles.

    Implications: Succession planning for all teams and committees

THREATS

1. Respondent survey fatigue:

    Implications: Challenges of maintaining high response rates and impact on the quality of the responses.

2. Audience fatigue and information overload for some audiences/too little information for other audiences—what types of reports do audiences need? When? How?

    Implications: Understanding how the audiences' information needs change in order to adapt and maintain interest in the project and its results.

3. Change in youth communication patterns (e.g. decreasing use of land lines).

    Implications: Although new communication technologies present an opportunity, they also challenge the current model. Modifications to the surveys can impact trend data and designing and testing interfaces for the new mediums absorbs resources. Is keeping up to date with rapidly changing technology sustainable? How do we maintain the quality of the project while ensuring it is adapting to changing technology trends that impact response rates?

4. Adult learners may be a bigger percentage of our student body given the aging population.

    Implications: Do the new modes of delivery work for the older generation of students?

5. Complex student enrolment patterns: laddering of programs, transfer, returning to learning. Student populations may overlap across surveys and institutions. Varying relevance of graduation versus near completion.

6. Funding challenges:
   a) Increased costs of administering surveys while budgets are decreasing.
   b) Third party funding for projects uncertain.

    Implications: Find new revenue sources, project efficiencies, or reduce the scope of the project.

7. Loss of long standing project champions as they leave their current positions.

    Implications: Need to ensure key decision makers are well briefed about the Student Outcomes project.

Appendix B: Highlights from Previous Strategic Plan (2011-12)

Expand Scope
A. Assess interest of [research] universities to include diploma and certificate graduates in outcomes research projects.
B. Explore the possibility of linking student outcomes data with other data sets for specific research projects.
C. Liaise with any group developing a multi-institutional survey of BC postsecondary students.
D. Provide data to help institutions with revenue generation (e.g. continuing education, international students). Develop outcomes survey models for continuing education, cost recovery programs, international students, etc.
E. Broaden the scope of the project to survey different groups of students, e.g. international, developmental and collaborative programs (high school and postsecondary), diplomas at universities.

Use of Data
A. Provide users with reliable occupation and salary information to understand BC's Labour Market.
B. Create more user-friendly products (like Search BC Post-Secondary Student Survey Results)
C. Build relationships with other projects and data sources; for example, supplement survey data with administrative data to reduce questionnaire length.
D. Determine the implications of the provincial government's Open Data initiative.
E. Identify information needs of key stakeholder groups.

Refine Current Surveys
A. Separating students by discipline – especially students from lower Arts and Sciences programs – using course completion information available from the CDW.
B. Develop a multi-phased approach to obtain outcomes information (evaluation of education and labour market 2- and 5-year out). Consider developing a model for collecting longitudinal data (e.g. 5 year out).
C. Continue to align Outcomes questionnaires and cohorts, including formalizing the core set of questions for all students.
D. Increase response rates for small programs to support decision making.
E. Employ new technologies and explore options to survey using handheld devices.