

# A System to Improve Responses to External Surveys

**Julia Pet-Armacost**  
**Robert L. Armacost**  
University of Central Florida



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# Presentation Outline

- Background on external surveys
- Managing the process
- The role of quality assurance
- A system to improve survey responses
  - Organization
  - Data repository
- Demonstration of EXCEL data repository
- Database development

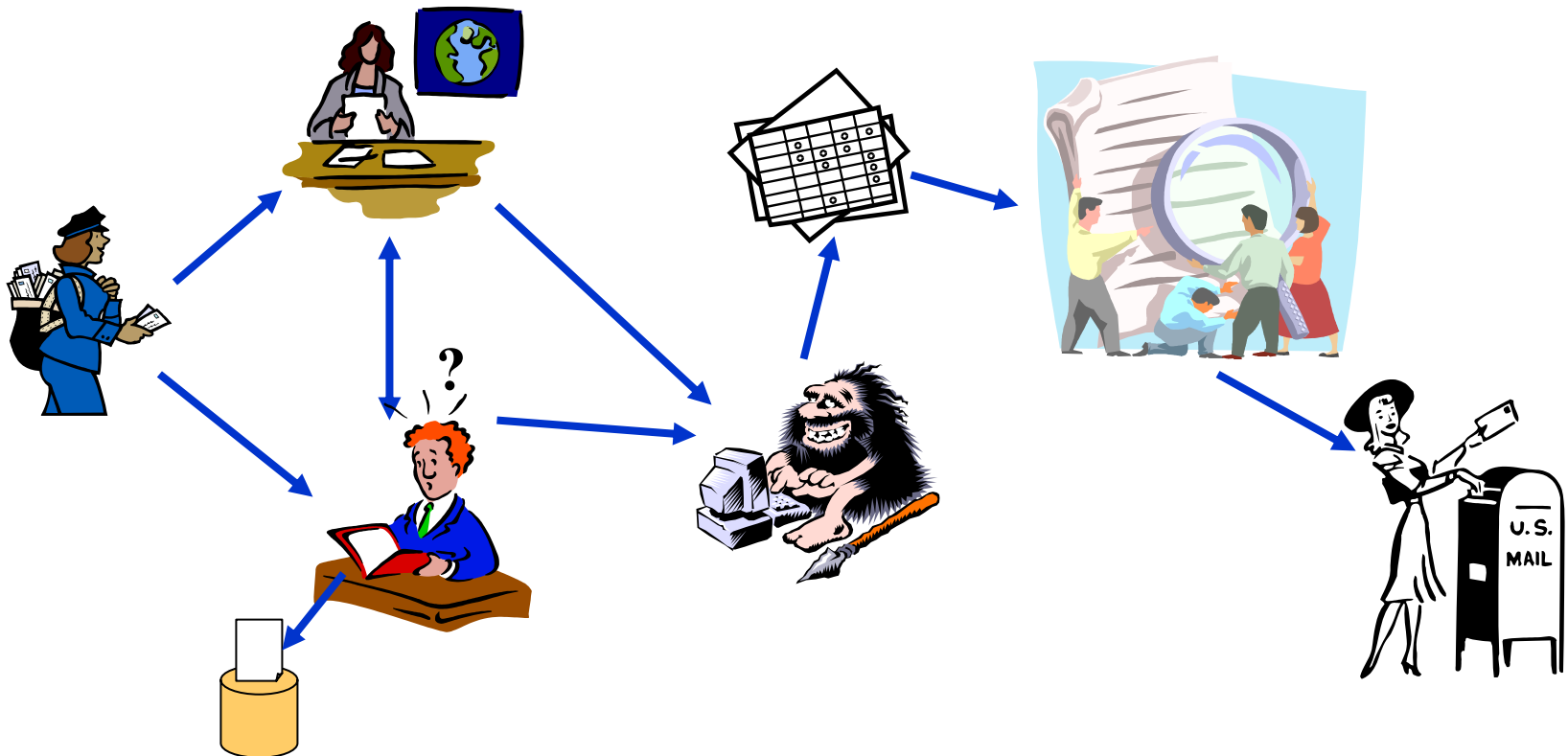
# The University of Central Florida

- Established in 1963 in Orlando, Florida: Metropolitan Research University
- Grown from 2,600 to 39,000 students in 39 years
  - 32,500 undergraduates and 6,500 graduates
- Doctoral intensive
  - 76 Bachelors, 57 Masters, 3 Specialist, and 19 PhD programs
- Second largest undergraduate enrollment in state
- Approximately 900+ faculty and 3500 staff
- Six colleges and two schools
  - Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Education, Engineering and Computer Science, Health and Public Affairs, Honors, Optics, and Hospitality Management

# What Are External Surveys?

- Surveys and questionnaires
  - Sent by entities external to the institution
  - To be completed by someone in the institution
- Data requests
  - May be general
  - Could be program specific
- Frequency
  - Periodic
  - Occasional

# Survey Process



# Who Sends Them?

- Student characteristics
  - Wintergreen-Orchard House
  - US News (finance, financial aid, Market Facts, Main survey, graduate school surveys)
  - College Board (annual survey of colleges)
  - Petersons (annual survey of undergraduate institutions)
  - ACT (institutional data questionnaire)
  - Barron's (profiles of American colleges)
- Financial characteristics
  - AAUP (annual faculty compensation)
  - NACUBO (tuition discounting)
  - CUPA-HR (national faculty salary)
- Many more...

# Who Receives Them?

- First point of contact
  - Provost, VP, or Dean (Market Facts, Inc.)
  - Admissions or Registrar's office (US News)
  - Deans, Graduate office (graduate program data)
  - Human Resources (CUPA-HR)
  - Financial Aid office (US News financial aid)
  - Administration and Finance (NACUBO, US News finance)
  - Information Technologies office (Most Wired)
  - Institutional Research
- Institutions generally can designate their point of contact when they complete it the first time

# Why Are They Important?

- Used in comparisons of institutions, disciplines, and programs for
  - Benchmarking, performance measurement, State budgets
- Used in national and regional studies
  - Faculty salaries, foundation growth, retention, diversity
- Used in rankings
  - US News America's best colleges, US News Graduate Program Rankings, Kiplinger's Best Values in Public Schools, America's Most Wired
- Provides external view of institutions
  - Peterson's Guide, many other college guidebooks



# What Are the Primary Issues?

- Ensuring that the university responds to the “important” surveys
- Ensuring timely response
- Ensuring quality
  - No blanks, no “big” errors, “best” response
- Ensuring consistency in the responses
  - Official census data versus operational data
  - Submission dates differ from when official data are available
  - Last year’s responses compared to this year’s responses
  - Last year’s definitions compared to this year’s definitions

# The Role of IR in Managing the Process

- IR has responsibility for “certifying” official data
- Should external surveys be considered as part of this responsibility?
- If not IR, who should it be?
- Can an institution afford to handle external surveys without a quality assurance process?
- Do you know what surveys are received by the institution?
- Do you know how well they are being completed?
- Do you know that they are completed at all?

# Steps to Improving the External Survey Process

- Collect past submissions and start developing an inventory of external surveys
  - Who, what, when, where, why
- Identify the “important” surveys
  - Major rankings, studies, funding, guide books
- Evaluate the quality of past responses
  - Timeliness
  - Appropriateness of responses
  - Completeness of responses
- Develop and implement a quality assurance process

# Ways to Conduct Inventory

- Ask each major office to provide a list
  - Deans
  - Research office
  - Graduate office
  - Provost
  - President's office
  - Admissions and Registrar's office
  - Human Resources
  - Administration and Finance
  - Student Service areas
- Environmental scanning
  - AIR Alerts, publications (Chronicle of Higher Ed), societies

# Collect Information About Each External Survey

- Who?
  - Sends it (organization and name of person)
  - Receives it (office and name of person)
  - Responds to it (office(s) and name(s))
    - Data extracts and analysis
    - Data entry
  - Reviews it (office(s) and names(s))
  - Submits it (office and name)

# Collect Information About Each External Survey (continued)

- What?
  - Is the purpose of the survey
  - What will the survey responses be used for
  - Types of data and information are requested
    - Institutional information
    - Financial
    - Student
    - Faculty and staff
    - Facilities
    - Financial aid
    - Technology
    - Grants and contracts
    - Endowment and alumni giving

# Collect Information About Each External Survey (continued)

- When?
  - Is it received by the institution
  - Is it started
  - Are the data available
  - Is the survey completed
  - Is the survey due
  - Is the survey submitted
- Where?
  - Are the data found
  - Are the resources (time and staff)
  - Is the quality assurance

# Collect Information About Each External Survey (continued)

- Why?
  - Did people respond or not respond
  - Is it important to respond
  - Is accuracy important
- Can't do them all
- Focus on the most important ones first
  - Institutional image
  - Strategic initiatives
  - Rankings



# Establish Process for Key Surveys

- Who should manage and coordinate the process?
  - Probably IR
- Responsibilities
  - Serve as the primary contact
  - Develop schedule
  - Contact data providers and follow-up
  - Coordinate data entry
  - Coordinate quality assurance process
  - Coordinate submission
  - Create a library of past responses

# Developing a Schedule

- Some survey questions depend on data from other surveys—precedence relations
  - US News depends on IPEDS
- Due dates (can often get extensions)
- Major activities with uncertain time durations
  - Contact and collect data from data providers
  - Data entry
  - Quality assurance
  - Submission
- Feedback loops
- Resource constraints (not under your control)

# Providing Quality Assurance

- Process (meeting deadlines)
  - Review performance against planned schedule
- Product (content)
  - Data need to be reviewed by people who understand the uses of the data
    - Important surveys reviewed by “important” administrators
    - Lesser surveys reviewed by technical staff
  - Data need to be reviewed in context
    - Prior year’s responses (at minimum last year)
    - Computed values
  - Eliminate blanks
    - Sometimes treated as zero

# Getting Started: Creating Historical Files to Support Quality Assurance

- Create database (worksheet) containing all responses to a given survey
  - Enter past 2-3 years
  - Add new responses each year
  - Compute percent change and highlight major changes (reviewed by staff)
  - Add sheet with important computed values and performance indicators (reviewed by administrators)
    - Student to faculty ratio
    - Percent minority
    - Percent full-time faculty
    - Percent faculty with terminal degree
- [Survey Database Sheet](#)

# Example Historical Files

- [US News Example](#)
- A way to get started
- Allows quality assurance for individual surveys
- Does not ensure consistency of responses across surveys
- Very labor intensive to maintain
- Very labor intensive to conduct quality assurance
  - Inefficient because same questions appear on multiple surveys
- Does not lend itself for other purposes

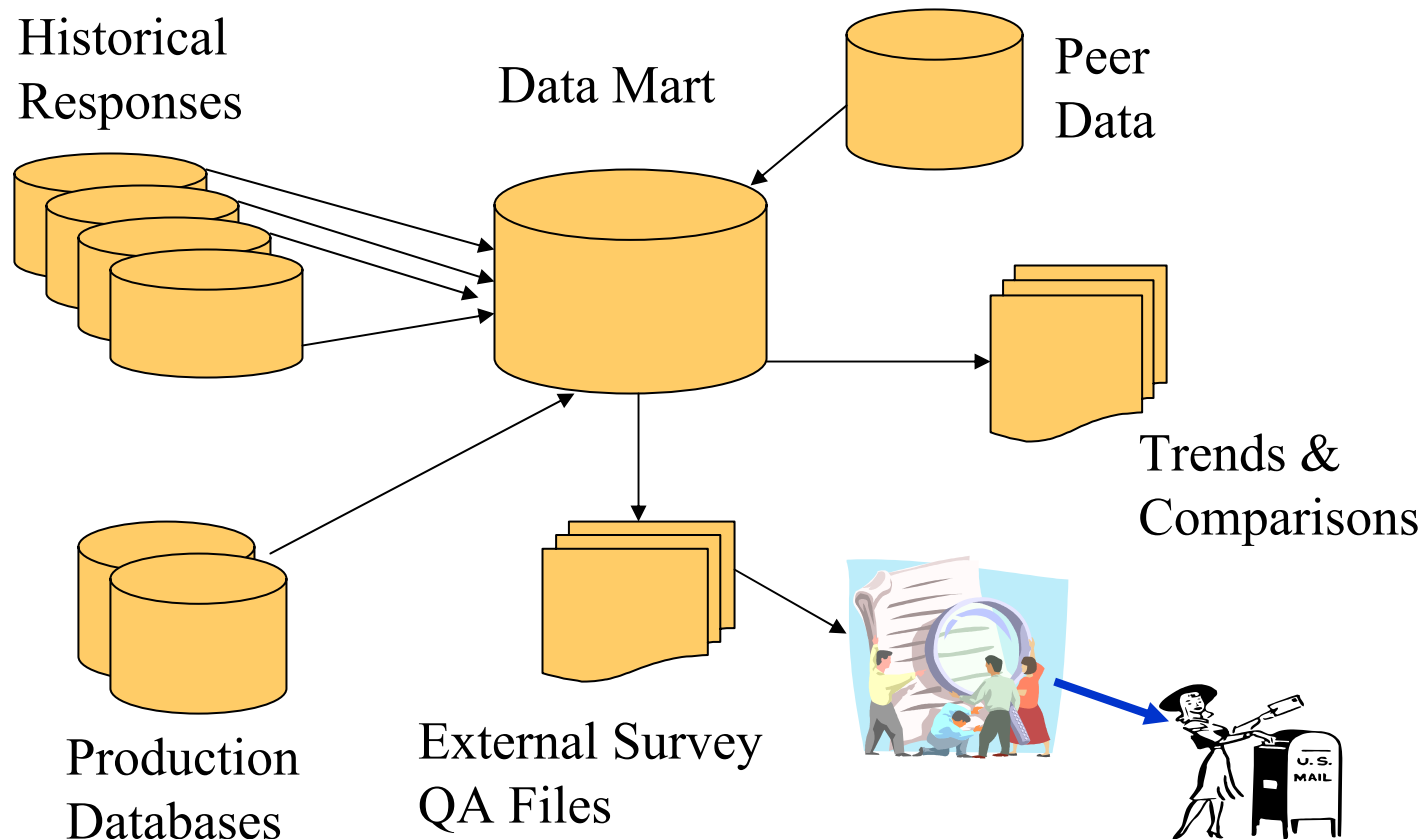
# Development of a Data Mart

- Automates extraction of data at appropriate time
- Consolidates data extraction and institutional information for multiple surveys
  - Eliminates duplication of effort
- Allows more efficient quality assurance process
  - Eliminates duplication of effort
- Allows use of entire data set for other purposes
  - Trends
  - Benchmarking

# Start By Creating A Comprehensive List of Data Elements

- Requires at least three levels of descriptors
  - Data element (data about what?)
    - Institution, facilities, faculty, UG students, graduate students, regulations, etc.
  - Data sub-element (more specific descriptor)
    - Faculty\_statistics, faculty\_policies, UG student\_enrollment
  - Data item (detailed description)
    - UG student\_enrollment\_total full-time
- Classifying the data elements will facilitate data queries
  - Each will have a unique identifier
- [Example survey element table](#)

# Developing a Data Mart to Support the External Survey Process





# Challenges to Developing the Data Mart

- Very large set of different elements
- Survey questions change
- Definitions may differ across surveys
  - SAT Scores
    - Mean, median, percentiles
    - First-time freshmen (includes summer?)
- Collecting and using data on historical submissions
  - Records not kept
  - Measurement methods have changed
- Automating the extraction
  - Synchronizing the extractions with the survey due dates
  - Some elements not in databases