5. Strategy for Presentation

The new format for self-studies, divided between Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, will serve this region well. Indeed, while a data portfolio may be appreciated by outside evaluators, it will be appreciated even more by the campus community.

Paper reports of enrollment, for instance, have long been distributed to department chairs and deans. The expense of paper distribution, as well as the time required to duplicate and mail these reports, will no longer be necessary. Replacing paper reports with an interactive web-based portfolio presents interesting challenges and exciting prospects. The ability to conduct customized searches of already-existing data holds great promise for researchers and administrators alike. The data already resides on campus; making this data more widely accessible will make the institution’s organization more horizontal because more and more people will have access to the data that is driving institutional decisions. Further, forging a union between web technology and existing data will make decisions even more data-driven than they are today.

Presenting the raw data alone will be insufficient. We will need to present carefully crafted introductory essays to introduce each data segment and to explain its use and its meaning. Raw data in and of itself is not meaningfully accessible; instructions for the use of the data must be carefully written if we are to make this data truly available to those who seek it out.

Frankly, setting up such a system will not be easy. The presentation of the huge amount of data currently available must be designed with an eye both toward comprehensiveness as well as toward comprehensibility. In addition, some data formats are specified by external parties such as the Office of the Chancellor and specialized accreditation agencies; in these cases, the University must respect the wishes of the external organization while, at the same time, taking care to make the data comprehensible to members of the campus community. Still, once such a system is designed, updating it will be relatively easy.