

Strategic Planning Proposal

Preparing Women for Rewarding Lives in a Rapidly changing World: Acquiring Outcomes Assessment Data to Better Understand Where Graduates Go and How to Better Prepare Students

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In collaboration with Cate Rowan, director of Institutional Research, I am submitting a proposal to implement an annual survey of all alumnae to assess ongoing outcome data of Smith graduates. Specifically, I am proposing that data be routinely collected to inform the questions of employment, job titles, career trajectories, relevance of undergraduate experiences, and graduate and professional school data. This information will serve as a baseline of information about post-graduate paths of alumnae, but will further enable Smith to map back to institutional data for deeper assessment and analysis. Moreover, it will help the Smith community to greater understand the capacities one should have when transitioning beyond the college.

To achieve this goal, several steps need to be explored and implemented. First, a committee should be put in place to determine what specific data the institution is seeking and why. Additionally, strategies should be fleshed out to ensure that data collected can be centralized but accessible to a wide audience including staff, faculty, and administrators. Presently, silos of general information on alumnae exist, prohibiting a shared system of information access. For example, individual departments may have information from surveys and interactions with alumnae, which is housed within the department. Smith should strive to achieve a more centralized strategy of data collection, but making such information accessible for department reviews, speaker and mentor programs, graduate school information, and the like.

Second, a survey needs to be selected, one that aims to suit the needs of the many constituents seeking outcomes data. Clearly, there is a broad demand for this information, which necessitates finding a comprehensive instrument that is also user friendly. Several exist that should be explored, including HEDS and COFHE.

Lastly, Smith needs to determine if it intends to outsource the project to an external vendor, such as MIT. An outside vendor would mount and distribute the survey, and feed the data back to Smith. Alternatively, software can be purchased, enabling Smith to accomplish these tasks internally, albeit using staff time. A cost benefit analysis needs to be completed to determine which path should be taken. Very roughly, a project of this nature would have higher start-up costs in the ballpark of \$10,000 if it were to be implemented in-house, and subsequently lower annual costs after the first year. Conversely, utilizing an outside vendor would have an annual cost of approximately \$3,000-\$5,000. I wish to emphasize that this is a very rough estimate; the cost ongoing assessment tools is an area that needs to be explored in greater detail.

The goal will be to develop a rich database that can be used by constituencies throughout the institution for assessment and evaluation purposes, using research standards for data

collection. This database will feed into, and interact with alumnae data bases used for development purposes, but the data will be specifically structured and designed for research and analysis purposes, including unit-record-level outcomes data. We will, of course, work closely with ITS to integrate these data sources with alumnae and development data to maximize the value of our data collection efforts.