



Institutional Research puts priority on Achieving the Dream

Staff

IR staff are (left to right) Lesa Clark, Pat Sumner, Natalie Alleman Beyers, Ralph Juhnke, LaWanda Hughes, Cheryl Shaw and Gina Brewer.

A story about institutional research could be as dry as discussing statistical models. Not so when the story is about JCCC's IR office.

"There is always something new going on – different projects, different people and different problems to solve," said Dr. Ralph Juhnke, director, Institutional Research.

Juhnke, named director of the eight-member office in February, wants his staff to be viewed as approachable and their reports as accurate and accessible.

The IR staff met in March and began to reorganize priorities around three questions: What are we doing that we could do better?, What are we doing we should not be doing? and What are we not doing that we should be doing?

Outcomes from those meetings have resulted in more emphasis on student success indicators, especially since JCCC recently signed onto Achieving the Dream, a national initiative to help community college students succeed.

"The college has announced that we are involved in the Achieving the Dream and that requires that we use data to define problems, help develop programs to resolve those issues and measure student success (completer courses, certificates and degrees)," Juhnke said. "While we formerly had anecdotal information, Achieving the Dream really requires us to use data to focus on measurable outcomes and be open and forthright about current performance."

Institutional Research is also looking at doing more environmental scanning by mapping the community to look at where students and community members live so the college can promote itself to different populations and understand what programs and services these populations need.

With the advent of a new JCCC Web site and its internal Infoshare, Juhnke says IR is looking at new opportunities to distribute reports and communicate more effectively than in the past.

"We are making decisions about what kind of information people want and how we can make them accessible, both internally and to the public," Juhnke said.

Many reports, formerly only available in book form, already reside on IR's Web site, including the Indicators and Outcomes 2007-2008 that shows success and room for improvement. Juhnke foresees a greater demand for IR data by the president and board members, particularly as the college focuses on learner engagement, learning outcomes, faculty and student development and workforce education.

IR would also like to assist in more qualitative research.

"This office has had an emphasis on quantitative research, but there is a complementary way to collect information through qualitative research. Quantitative analysis can tell you how one group is different from another. Qualitative information collected in a focus group can tell you why the groups are different."

With seven staff members (one position yet to be filled), IR hopes to build positive, productive relationships across the campus.

"I hope IR is always seen as approachable," Juhnke said. "We want to tell it like it is – not soft pedal information. We want to be fair, accurate and help the college find solutions. We want to do excellent work that is valuable." 