

A Census of Researchers in the California Community College System: Results of a Telephone Interview Survey

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For years, the RP Group has guessed about the capacity of California Community Colleges to conduct research and planning. Discussions have previously been based on mostly anecdotal evidence. In Fall 2005, the RP Group Board decided that it was time to acquire a more accurate picture based on what we do best, collect data. Using the resources of the Board, members called college and district offices around the state conducting interviews with their colleagues. The Board was able to contact research and/or planning offices at 66 institutions; 47 were college offices and 19 were district offices. A follow-up survey in Fall 2006 collected information on the number and title of research positions for the rest of the colleges and districts, completing the census of 109 colleges and 20 district offices.

The preliminary results from this survey were presented at the CISOA/RP Group conference in April 2006. At this session, interest was high and the resulting discussion was both lively and provocative. New areas to explore are identified and discussed at the conclusion of this article.

Key Findings

- There are six colleges with no research office: two are single college districts; four are the only college in district with no office.
- There are five districts where research is only at the colleges.
- There are three districts where research is only at the district office (6 colleges).
- The mode of total office FTE is 1.0 for all offices, however, district offices have a mode of 2.0 and as college size increases, the mode increases to 3.0.
- College Institutional Research and/or Planning (IRP) offices are much less likely to have research analysts and clerical support than are district IRP offices.
- Nearly half of IRP offices have no research analysts (e.g., they are one person offices with either no staff or only clerical assistance).
- District offices have a higher average salaries and benefits budget. District offices have a higher average discretionary budget as well.
- Staff in IRP offices are capable of much more than they are being asked to do - evidence of a mismatch between the expertise available and the expertise that is being demanded by their audience.

Office Staffing

Responses were gathered from all 129 sites on the total full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing in each IRP office. The results are presented in the table below. Seventeen sites reported not having research capacity located at their site, however, it is important to note the following:

- Six colleges have no research capacity: two are single college districts; four are the only college in district with no office
- Five districts have research located only at the colleges
- Six colleges have research located only at the district office

Full-time Equivalent (FTE) by Office Type

	College Offices		District Offices		All Offices	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
None	12	11.0%	5	25.0%	17	13.2%
Less than 1	2	1.8%	0	0.0%	2	1.6%
One	24	22.0%	3	15.0%	27	20.9%
More than 1, less than 2	14	12.8%	0	0.0%	14	10.9%
Two	21	19.3%	4	20.0%	25	19.4%
More than 2, less than 3	13	11.9%	1	5.0%	14	10.9%
3 or More, but less than 4	14	12.8%	1	5.0%	15	11.6%
4 or More, but less than 5	5	4.6%	3	15.0%	8	6.2%
5 or More	4	3.7%	3	15.0%	7	5.4%
Total	109		20		129	
Mean (Average)	2.13		2.95		2.24	
Median	2		2.25		2	
Mode	1		2		1	

FTE by College Size

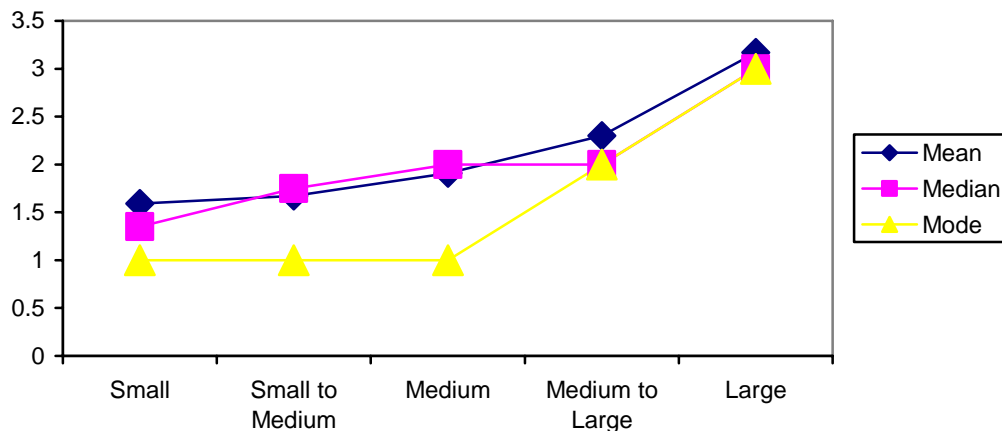
College size for the purposes of the comparisons presented here is based on Fall 2005 student headcount. The table below presents the categories used and the counts and percentages in each category for all colleges, single college districts, and colleges in multi-college districts.

College Size

	All Colleges		Single College		Multi-College	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Small (Less than 5,000)	13	11.9%	8	15.4%	5	8.8%
Small to Medium (5,000 - 9,999)	28	25.7%	12	23.1%	16	28.1%
Medium (10,000 - 14,999)	31	28.4%	13	25.0%	18	31.6%
Medium to Large (15,000 - 19,999)	15	13.8%	7	13.5%	8	14.0%
Large (20,000 or more)	22	20.2%	12	23.1%	10	17.5%
Total	109		52		57	

Not surprisingly, as college size increases, IRP office FTE also increases. The chart below illustrates how the mean, median and mode change as college size changes.

IRP Office FTE by College Size



Support Positions

Almost half of the college IRP offices who completed the in-depth telephone survey have no research analysts, whereas most district offices have one or more analysts. This finding is corroborated by the census finding that district offices have an average of 2.95 FTE whereas college offices have an average of 2.13 FTE. The table below presents the FTE for analysts by office type.

	FTE for Research Analysts					
	College Offices		District Offices		All Offices	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Zero	20	45.5%	4	23.5%	24	39.3%
0.25	1	2.3%	0	0.0%	1	1.6%
0.75	1	2.3%	0	0.0%	1	1.6%
0.80	1	2.3%	0	0.0%	1	1.6%
1.00	17	38.6%	5	29.4%	22	36.1%
2.00	4	9.1%	5	29.4%	9	14.8%
3.00	0	0.0%	3	17.6%	3	4.9%
Total	44		17		61	

The telephone survey found that seventy percent of college IRP offices have no clerical staff, compared to 44 percent among district offices. The table below presents the results for clerical FTE by office type.

	FTE for Clerical Staff					
	College Offices		District Offices		All Offices	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Zero	32	69.6%	8	44.4%	40	62.5%
Less than 0.50	4	8.7%	1	5.6%	5	7.8%
0.50	2	4.3%	2	11.1%	4	6.3%
1.00	6	13.0%	7	38.9%	13	20.3%
1.50	1	2.2%	0	0.0%	1	1.6%
2.00	1	2.2%	0	0.0%	1	1.6%
Total	46		18		64	

Positions, Responsibilities, and Education

Director is the most common job title of the lead IRP person at both college and district IRP offices, followed by Dean and Coordinator. Most common among single college districts is Director (64%) compared to 19% at colleges in multi-college districts, where the most common job title is Dean (23%). Director is most common regardless of size, however, smaller colleges are more likely to have Researchers or Analysts as the chief IRP position, and larger offices are more likely to have Deans. The table below presents the results by office type.

Job Title by Office Type

	College Offices		District Offices		All Offices	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Director (incl. Sr. Dir, Exec. Dir)	44	47.3%	6	42.9%	50	46.7%
Dean (incl. Assoc. Dean)	16	17.2%	0	0.0%	16	15.0%
Coordinator	10	10.8%	1	7.1%	11	10.3%
Analyst	9	9.7%	0	0.0%	9	8.4%
Researcher	5	5.4%	0	0.0%	5	4.7%
Vice Chancellor (incl. Assoc VC)	1	1.1%	3	21.4%	4	3.7%
Officer	3	3.2%	0	0.0%	3	2.8%
Vice President	3	3.2%	0	0.0%	3	2.8%
Manager	0	0.0%	2	14.3%	2	1.9%
Specialist	1	1.1%	1	7.1%	2	1.9%
Chief	0	0.0%	1	7.1%	1	0.9%
Supervisor	1	1.1%	0	0.0%	1	0.9%
<i>Subtotal</i>	93	85.3%	14	70.0%	107	82.9%
None	12	11.0%	5	25.0%	16	12.4%
Unreported	4	3.7%	1	5.0%	6	4.7%
Total	109		20		129	

Job title data from the census and surveys were analyzed to assess the principal areas of responsibility for the IRP offices. As expected, the most common responsibility was “research” among both college and district IRP offices, with planning coming in a distant second. “Research” is also more common among single college districts (85%) than colleges in multi-college districts (72%). The table below presents these results by office type.

Areas of Responsibility by Office Type

	College Offices		District Offices		All Offices	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Research	85	78.0%	13	65.0%	98	76.0%
Planning	36	33.0%	5	25.0%	41	31.8%
Grants/Development/ Advancement	10	9.2%	0	0.0%	10	7.8%
Institutional Effectiveness	4	3.7%	1	5.0%	5	3.9%
Information Technology	3	2.8%	1	5.0%	4	3.1%
Academic/Educational Services	3	2.8%	1	5.0%	4	3.1%
Assessment	3	2.8%	0	0.0%	3	2.3%
SLOs	2	1.8%	0	0.0%	2	1.6%
Total*	109		20		129	

* Used the total number of respondents since there were duplicates on this item (e.g., research and planning).

The data from the in-depth telephone surveys revealed that most respondents at college IRP offices report to the president or president/superintendent (59%). The reporting line for respondents at district offices is a bit more distributed among different levels of the institution, but most report to a president or president/superintendent (52%).

Title of Direct Supervisor

	College Offices		District Offices		All Offices	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Chancellor	0	0.0%	1	5.3%	1	1.5%
President/Superintendent	9	19.6%	4	21.1%	13	20.0%
President	18	39.1%	3	15.8%	21	32.3%
Vice Chancellor/Assistant Chancellor	0	0.0%	3	15.8%	3	4.6%
Associate/Assistant Vice Chancellor	0	0.0%	4	21.1%	4	6.2%
Executive Vice President/Vice President	14	30.4%	2	10.5%	16	24.6%
Dean	4	8.7%	1	5.3%	5	7.7%
Director	1	2.2%	0	0.0%	1	1.5%
Executive Assistant to President	0	0.0%	1	5.3%	1	1.5%
Total	46		19		65	

The telephone survey indicated that about half of the lead IRP persons at both college and district offices have Master’s degrees, and a little more than 40 percent at each have doctoral degrees.

Highest Educational Level of Lead IRP Person

	College Offices		District Offices		All Offices	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Bachelor's	3	6.5%	1	5.3%	4	6.2%
Master's	23	50.0%	10	52.6%	33	50.8%
Doctorate	20	43.5%	8	42.1%	28	43.1%
Total	46		19		65	

Office Budget

Telephone survey respondents indicated that the average salary and benefits budget for college IRP offices was \$172,027 and for district offices the average budget was \$279,340. The median salary and benefits budget for college offices was \$150,000 compared to \$252,646 for district offices. The table below presents the data for salary and benefits by office type.

Salary and Benefits

	College Offices	District Offices	All Offices
	n = 41	n = 16	n = 57
Mean	\$172,027	\$279,340	\$202,150
SD	\$138,240	\$172,371	\$154,840
Median	\$150,000	\$252,646	\$170,000
Minimum	\$0	\$82,257	\$0
Maximum	\$860,557	\$753,000	\$860,557

The average discretionary budget for college IRP offices was \$8,860 compared to \$14,146 for district offices, according to the telephone survey. The table below presents the results for the discretionary budget by office type.

Discretionary	College Office	District Office	Total
	n = 39	n = 16	n = 55
Mean	\$8,860	\$14,146	\$10,398
SD	\$13,830	\$15,387	\$14,361
Median	\$4,300	\$8,613	\$5,970
Minimum	\$0	\$0	\$0
Maximum	\$73,909	\$58,350	\$73,909

According to the telephone survey, a majority of college IRP offices view the budget for clerical and research analyst support as inadequate whereas the budgets for software/hardware and office supplies were considered adequate. A majority of district IRP offices view their budgets for clerical support, travel, office supplies, and professional memberships as being adequate. The one area where a majority of district offices view their budget as inadequate is research analysts. When these results are compared by college size, offices at colleges with less than 15,000 students are slightly less satisfied than offices at larger colleges across the board. What is interesting is that offices at large colleges with more than 20,000 students are often less satisfied than offices at colleges with between 15,000 and 19,999 students. The table below presents the percentage of respondents in each category.

Adequacy of the Budget	College IRP Office (n=47)			District IRP Office (n=19)		
	Inadequate	Adequate	More than Adequate	Inadequate	Adequate	More than Adequate
Clerical Support	68.0	25.5	6.4	42.1	57.9	0.0
Research Analyst Support	66.0	25.5	8.5	52.6	42.1	5.3
Travel	46.8	48.9	4.3	42.1	57.9	0.0
Professional Memberships	38.3	51.1	10.6	15.8	78.9	5.3
Software/Hardware	38.3	53.2	8.5	42.1	47.4	10.5
Office Supplies	21.3	63.8	14.9	15.8	73.7	10.5

Office's Priorities and Role in Decision Making

During the in-depth telephone survey, researchers were asked to identify the level of priority for a list of activities. Those tasks receiving the highest priority among district IRP offices were:

- Analyzing students for patterns and trends
- Planning
- Creating data extracts and reports
- Preparing for accreditation visits

The tasks receiving the highest priority among college IRP offices were:

- Preparing for accreditation visits
- Program review
- Planning

When asked to indicate the role their office played in decision making at their institution, 55 percent report playing a major role, 35 percent report playing some role; and 10 percent report playing only a minor role or no role at all. Among single college district offices, 48 percent report playing a major role compared to 65% at colleges in multi-college districts. IRP Offices in small to medium colleges are slightly more likely to report playing a major role.

Expertise Available and (Under?) Utilized

The expertise of the staff in IRP offices related to the use of analytical tools is comparable between college and district offices. Over three fourths of IRP offices can perform most of the functions listed in the table below such as logistic regressions, ANOVAs, linear regressions and the like.

Expertise with Analytical Tools

	College IRP Offices n = 47	District IRP Offices n = 19
Graphic portrayal of data	97.9	100.0
Rate computations	95.7	100.0
Frequency distributions of categorical data	95.7	100.0
Chi-square	93.6	100.0
T-tests	93.6	100.0
Correlations	91.5	100.0
Trend comparisons	87.2	94.7
ANOVA	87.2	100.0
Linear regression	82.6	89.5
Factor or cluster analysis	78.7	89.5
Logistic regression	74.5	78.9
Discriminate analysis	61.7	89.5
Time-series analysis	59.6	52.6
Multinomial logistic regression	59.6	63.2
Canonical correlation	55.3	63.2
Path analysis	38.3	52.6
Event history modeling	14.9	36.8

When the expertise of IRP staff is compared to the analytic tools they actually used in the past 12 months, a significant disconnect is evident. While IRP offices are capable of advanced inferential statistics, they most often present data in graphs, compute rates, and perform frequency distributions. The question that must be asked is whether the expertise is being underutilized due to a lack of understanding or awareness, or are these advanced abilities simply not required in order to serve colleges' and districts' needs adequately and appropriated. The data in the table below indicate the combined responses of college and district IRP offices.

Utilization of Analytical Tools (n = 66)

	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Graphic portrayal of data	87.9	4.5	1.5	6.1
Rate computations	78.8	13.6	1.5	6.1
Frequency distributions of categorical data	81.8	7.6	3.0	7.6
Chi-square	16.7	40.9	12.1	30.3
T-tests	9.1	31.8	22.7	36.4
Correlations	22.7	36.4	16.7	24.2
Trend comparisons	50.0	24.2	6.1	19.7
ANOVA	3.0	18.2	36.4	42.4
Linear regression	4.5	27.3	27.3	40.9
Factor or cluster analysis	3.0	13.6	19.7	63.6
Logistic regression	7.6	15.2	16.7	60.6
Discriminate analysis	0.0	9.1	22.7	68.2
Time-series analysis	9.1	7.6	16.7	66.7
Multinomial logistic regression	0.0	6.1	16.7	77.3
Canonical correlation	0.0	6.1	16.7	77.3
Path analysis	1.5	6.1	9.1	83.3
Event history modeling	1.5	4.5	6.1	87.9

Office's Effectiveness

When asked what would increase their effectiveness, 81% of college IRP offices said additional staff. Additional staff was also the most commonly requested item among district IRP offices, though at a lower rate (63%). The table below presents all the results from this question.

Increased Effectiveness

	College IRP Offices n = 47	District IRP Offices n = 19
Additional Staff	80.9	63.2
Professional Development for Staff	44.7	52.6
Upgrade Software/Databases	38.3	36.8
Upper Level Administration to Use Research	36.2	42.1
More Competitive Pay	27.7	21.1
Upgrade Computer Hardware	27.7	26.3
More Space	21.3	36.8

Next Steps

The results from this project were a great first step in beginning to paint a picture of research and planning in the state. Among the next steps planned by the Board to continue this effort are to:

- Repeat the census of positions and FTE annually
- Further develop and refine the in-depth survey in order to yield information that is useful for planning and for policy making
- Conduct the in-depth survey every three years
- Put both the census reporting and in-depth survey online
- Use an RP Board subcommittee to conduct intensive follow-up to ensure full reporting from all 129 sites

- Have the same subcommittee contact any colleges or districts who post jobs on listserve to obtain relevant information on new hires

The RP Board will continue with this effort until every college and district is fully and accurately represented in the picture. The goals of the Board are to use this information to begin to establish “standards” for the research and planning function, to educate our colleagues about what research and planning professionals can offer, and to advocate for research and planning offices throughout the state.