Assessment Archaeology: Digging up old data for longitudinal assessments

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Background
Campus priorities for assessment have moved sharply in recent years, with departmental funding shifting from head counts and enrollment statistics to student retention and persistence to graduation. Library assessments were focused on counts of classes taught and students reached, but needed to be realigned with the longitudinal assessments required from the other academic units.

Getting started
Learn campus assessment priorities: retention and graduation rates
Develop workflow with Institutional Research office
Review existing statistics to find best opportunities to run a retroactive study

Using what you have
The best statistics available for tracking multi-year effects were for First Year Writing (FYW) courses. After reviewing and compiling lists of sections that received library instruction, IR staff ran an analysis to see if the students enrolled in these sections showed any variation in semester-to-semester retention as compared to students in other FYW sections and to the general population.

Data mismatch
The biggest drawback to our approach: the data that was clean and complete enough to use addressed a single, narrow point of contact that the library makes with students.
Retention is informed by student engagement, and library engagement is an interesting and complex part of that.

Lessons learned
1. Campus priorities are changing, and the library has an opportunity to stay engaged if we shift our own focus now
2. Internal dynamics are crucial: complete and accurate statistics will never exist if the librarians collecting them are not on board
3. Retention and progression to graduation are too complex to be assessed in terms of narrow, specific interventions

Next steps
Share results with other library units
Collect better stats
Coordinate broader assessments across library units
See how library engagement helps students persist and succeed

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