



RESILIENCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Most would agree that 2020 has brought its challenges. And, the higher education community certainly has not been immune to these unprecedented times. Stay-at-Home orders implemented across the nation in response to COVID-19 required higher education leaders to respond quickly by moving all courses and operations to remote environments. Social justice movements called for the higher education community to create and expand safe spaces for growth, healing, and restructuring, especially in the areas of police reform and race relations. And, just when we thought 2020 had seen the worst, massive hurricanes and raging wildfires brought significant destruction to the higher education community. Could higher education, an institution that is often compared to an elephant for its slow-paced response to change, respond quickly enough to these challenges? Is higher education truly a resilient institution? What information was needed to ensure that higher education continued to function at optimal levels?

The role of institutional research became increasingly vital to spring 2020 actions and planning for fall 2020; and will remain critical in semesters to come. Planning included special reports related to enrollment and retention projections to assessing student, faculty, and staff perceptions; space density and classroom use; and guidelines for face-to-face instruction in response to relevant safety policies and guidelines. In addition to surveys, the information for these analyses derived from local, state, and federal governments and health agencies.

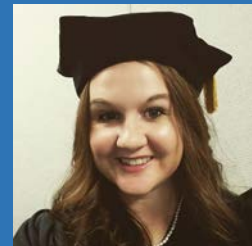
Two examples of this type of institutional research leadership can be found right here within our LAIR Officers from Lake Charles, Louisiana. Within a matter of weeks, Lake Charles suffered two devastating hurricanes amid a COVID-19 spike. Dane O'Blanc, Director of Institutional Research at McNeese State University, and Laura Wilkins, Reporting and Data Coordinator for Institutional Research at SOWELA, shared their experiences below.

EXTRA, EXTRA READ ALL ABOUT IT

This should not come as a surprise, but we have some super stars among us. Kristy Neal, the Assistant Director of Institutional Research at LSU A&M, will serve as the SAIR Treasurer. Dr. Emily Campbell, Chief Enrollment Management Officer at LCTCS, has been elected to serve as SAIR Vice President



Kristy Neal (SAIR Treasurer 2019-2021)



**Dr. Emily Campbell (SAIR Vice President;
2021 Program Chair)**



Dane O'Blanc, McNeese State University

“Over 95% of campus buildings [at McNeese State University] had some damage from Laura, and many of them sustained further damage from Delta. As a result, the majority of faculty and staff have been displaced from campus or are working in temporary offices in other buildings. Instruction for the fall 2020 semester has been moved to 100% online. Permanent repairs have begun on campus, and some buildings are slated to be open for the spring 2021 semester. Our [IR] office has assisted recovery efforts on a number of fronts. First, we were asked to administer a survey that went out to all students, faculty, and staff. [The] administration wanted to find out where our folks were located if they were in permanent or temporary housing and their technology situation. We were also asked to provide information on enrollment.”

Dane O'Blanc



Laura Wilkins, SOWELA

“SOWELA was devastated by Hurricanes Laura and Delta; 100% of SOWELA’s Main Campus buildings received some damage. Many of our faculty, staff, and students have been displaced. Staff are working from home with hot spots or in temporary offices in some of the less damaged buildings. Instruction for the Fall 2020 semester classes were temporarily moved to 100% online through September. The SOWELA Jennings and Oakdale sites were not badly affected by the storms and are running strong. On November 2nd SOWELA was able to re-open six of the Lake Charles campus buildings, bring students back to campus, and restart many programs that required “hands-on” instruction. According to Dr. Aspinwall, the Chancellor, the reopening of part of the campus has not been an easy feat; however, everyone was helpful and patient as the logistics were worked out. The general feeling around campus was that they are glad to be back and thankful to be working towards some renewed sense of normalcy.

Laura Wilkins

As far as the physical offices for the Office of Planning and Analysis (OPA) we are located in the part of the Phase II building; our offices are not useable at this time. The OPA staff are either working from home or motel rooms. Due to the storms ad hoc reports have been needed for the number of students still enrolled so that hot spots could be bought and distributed to those who did not have internet access in order for them to continue with their classes in an on-line format. Some of our classes do require “hands-on” and luckily, we were able to accommodate them in the less severely damaged buildings starting on November 2nd, or other campus sites in order to complete their course(s). For this IR was requested to produce class labs capacity limits so that rooms could be divided if possible and assigned to meet all of our classes’ needs.

SOWELA is continuing to evolve as needed in order to meet our students’ requirements; and to enroll students so they can continue with their education goals in the most challenging times of COVID and catastrophic hurricanes.”

STRONGER TOGETHER: DATA GOVERNANCE & ADVISORY COUNCIL

To facilitate its data collection, the Louisiana Board of Regents has developed a **Data Governance and Advisory Council** with representation from each system as well as the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (LAICU). These individual representatives will serve as a point of contact for systems regarding information and/or procedural changes needed relative to reporting. They will also help keep appropriate system staff informed on data submitted by institutions in response to Regents’ requests. This will ensure that system offices are engaged in messaging exchanged across institutions for data collection purposes. Furthermore, the group will establish regular meetings in an effort to enable continuous improvement not only for data collection and reporting purposes, but to also flag emerging trends across the postsecondary landscape in Louisiana. The council will

be coordinated by Kimberly Kirkpatrick from Regents. Members and their contact information are listed below. Please feel free to reach out to your System representative to be included in discussion.

- **LA Board of Regents**

Kimberly Kirkpatrick, Louisiana Board of Regents
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- **LAICU**

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INNOVATION AND ADAPTATION

Although we canceled this year's LAIR conference, your LAIR officers have been meeting regularly to ensure that we are able to roll out the necessary resources for the LAIR community. Even though COVID-19 has changed much of the ways we work and professionally develop, we believe LAIR must adapt. During the State meeting at the SAIR conference, many of you shared some innovative resources that could benefit the LAIR community. We heard you! We are asking that you participate in a brief 2-3-minute survey to help us better understand what resources would best fit your needs. Click [here](#) to take the survey. The survey will close on Wednesday December 2nd by COB.

STAY CONNECTED

Website: <https://www.la-air.org/air/>

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