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 Benchmark/Dashboard Final Report

A lot of information can be obtained from looking at College Results Online and the IPEDS data center. Looking at the data that is presented from both of these websites, the goal is to choose several colleges that are similar, look at various indicators at each institution that can predict institutional effectiveness and make observations about what these indicators can say about each institution.

Paul D'Anieri, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Florida reflected on statistics for the number of times college students will change their career in their lifetime. According to D'Anieri, "A liberal arts degree is the ideal preparation for that kind of world, even if the degree does not channel one neatly into one's first post-college job" (Driscoll). A liberal arts degree allows for the holistic development of the entire individual while gaining necessary and important transferable skills that lead to success, as JP Hansen, an author and career expert notes, "A liberal arts degree provides an inherent advantage in written and oral communication, interpersonal skills, problem solving, critical and analytical thinking, and adaptability to change... The ability to comprehend, communicate, and conquer problems is the name of the game and is implied with a liberal arts degree." (Driscoll).

Small liberal arts college's allow for a more personalized experience where you are a person and more than just a number. Sitting in a classroom of 15 students verses a lecture hall of 600 students and working with faculty that are dedicated to classroom facilitation and one on one interactions with students compared to research and notoriety allow students the opportunity for faculty members to focus more on student work. Having become a proponent for small, private 4-year liberal arts Colleges, Maryville College has been chosen as the selected institution of choice. Maryville College is a small private liberal arts college located in Maryville Tennessee and only has about 1,168 students. Therefore, after looking at College Results online for institutions that are close matches to Maryville College, The College of Idaho, Houghton College, Northwestern College, Spring Hill College and Doan College-Crete have been chosen as benchmark institutions to compare Maryville College with. The chart below shows first year retention rates, number of students, tuition costs for living on campus, the campus designation and 4 year, 5 year and 6 year graduation rates.

Institution Name	First Year Retention Rates	# of Students	Tuition	Designation	Graduation Rates 4 year, 5year, 6 year
Maryville College	72%	1,168	\$43,638	Private, Not-for-profit	46.7%, 55.5%, 55.8%
The College of Idaho	83%	1,095	\$34,555	Private, Not-for-profit	53.6%, 62.5%, 66.5%
Houghton College	88%	1,081	\$38,602	Private, Not-for-profit	64.8%, 71.6%, 73.1%
Northwestern College	77%	1,233	\$37,884	Private, Not-for-profit	53.1%, 62.3%, 63.3%
Spring Hill College	74%	1,292	\$44,696	Private, Not-for-profit	47.1%, 55.0%, 56.3%
Doan College-Crete	76%	1,113	\$36,370	Private, Not-for-profit	51.0%, 60.2%, 60.2%

Information in this table was taken from College Results online.

Just looking at the information above, Maryville College has the lowest rates among first year retention rates as well as the lowest 4 year, 5 year and 6 year graduation rates as well. Considering the institution has a much higher tuition than most of the similar institutions it will be interesting to utilize IPEDS data to see the following questions:

- 1) What is the demographic makeup of each institution? (College Results Online)
 - a. How many male/female students attend each institution?
 - b. What do the demographics look like for each institution?
 - i. Minority vs. Non-minority populations
 - ii. Male vs. Female

Institution Name	% Female	% Male	Under-represented Minority
Maryville College	55.8%	44.2%	9.2%
The College of Idaho	58.2%	41.8%	16.3%
Houghton College	66.3%	33.7%	4.6%
Northwestern College	56.0%	44.0%	7.5%
Spring Hill College	60.2%	39.8%	25.6%
Doan College-Crete	51.4%	48.6%	8.9%

- 2) What does the funding structure look like at each institution? (IPEDS)
- How much does each institution spend on student services?
 - How much does each institution spend on faculty/academic instruction
 - Tenured vs. non tenured
 - Full time vs. Part Time
 - Salaries

Institution Name	\$ Spent on Student Service	\$ Spent on Instruction	# of Full Time /Part Time Faculty
Maryville College	26% \$4,720/year	39% \$7,181	73/79
The College of Idaho	29% \$5,882/year	37% \$7,465/year	83/45
Houghton College	25% \$5,521/year	45% \$10,107/year	73/39
Northwestern College	26% \$5,014/year	44% \$8,464/year	84/58
Spring Hill College	28% \$6,607/year	30% \$6,999/year	73/53
Doan College-Crete	26% \$5,666/year	47% \$10,167/year	80/49

Institution Name	Average Salary for Professor	Average Salary for Associate Professor	Average Salary for Assistant Professor	Average Salary for Instructor
Maryville College	\$72,864	\$57,132	\$58,149	\$40,374
The College of Idaho	\$67,023	\$50,823	\$48,501	\$37,494
Houghton College	\$24,102	\$47,457	\$43,389	\$36,333
Northwestern College	\$64,287	\$55,782	\$47,160	\$47,259
Spring Hill College	\$68,967	\$54,504	\$48,132	\$47,169
Doan College-Crete	\$68,904	\$53,775	\$44,289	\$33,759

- 3) Selectivity (College Results Online)
- What are the percentages of admission?
 - What are the averages of test scores for incoming students?
 - What is the average GPA of incoming students?
 - What are the numbers of degrees awarded and what areas?
 - Does the institution have a defined niche to attract a specific student-base?

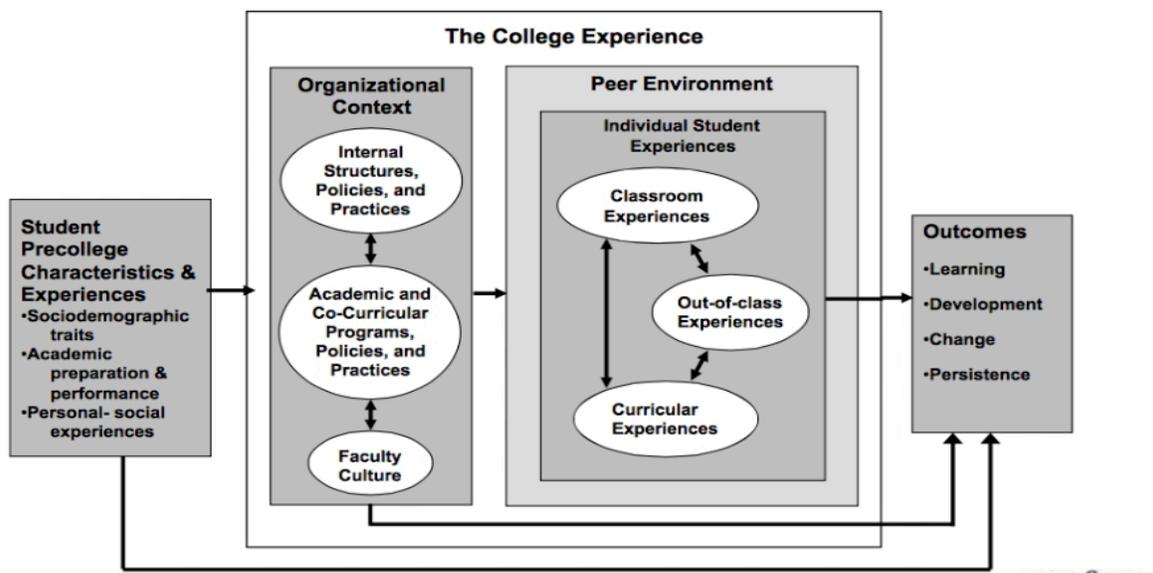
Institution Name	Admission %	SATS/ACTS of Incoming Students	Average GPA of Incoming Students
Maryville College	65.6%	1,055	3.50
The College of Idaho	64.9%	1,115	3.64
Houghton College	73.4%	1,143	3.59
Northwestern College	73.6%	1,115	3.53
Spring Hill College	47.4%	1,090	3.44
Doan College-Crete	76.5%	1,090	3.49

One thing that is quite apparent from institutional data and the institutional research process is that numbers tell a story. Earlier it was reported that institutional researchers can be spin doctors, creating a specific story for each institution, however without the spin, the numbers can still tell a story. Comparing one institution with other institutions allows for institutions to see, not only how they compare to other similar institutions but also areas of improvement that can create beneficial opportunities for that individual institution.

When conducting any form of institutional research it is important to have a research question in mind. For the purpose of this project, the research question is, “From looking at 5 institutions similar to Maryville College, can a determination be made as to why these 5 institutions are more effective with their first year retention rates and their 4 year, 5 year and 6 year graduation rates?”

Furthermore having a research model is also important to answering these questions therefore deciding which indicators are important predictors for institutional effectiveness it is important to have a model that will be flexible enough to examine multiple perspectives with the available data. To best guide this research, Terenzini and Reason’s Comprehensive Outcomes Model has been chosen. The model allows for the ability to look at pre-college characteristics which can be gathered from College Results Online and IPEDs data to examine student characteristics such as financial aid, ethnicity, and high school performance (GPA) and test scores (ACTs, SATs, etc) and to compare them with Faculty culture and internal practices, policies and structures (faculty vs. student ratio, money spent on faculty salaries, full time vs. part time faculty, tenured vs. non-tenured, etc) and money spent on the co-curricular experience through money spent on student services to look at the outcome of persistence.

Terenzini’s Comprehensive Outcomes Model



Source: Terenzini & Reason, 2005; Reason & Terenzini, 2006



After looking at the numbers and data above, Maryville College has one of the largest tuition costs however spends the least overall on student services and instruction. If Maryville College committed more money to funding important student services related to the development of the student and more money on the actual instruction, Maryville College might have a better chance of increasing 4-year, 5-year and 6-year graduation rates.

Maryville College is committed though to paying the faculty better than any of the institutions examined,

and creating a talented and engaged faculty community is important for the overall well being of the campus because well-paid instructors shows that Maryville College can stay committed to attracting the best educators to the institution.

The policies that Maryville College has also implemented around admissions selectivity with 66% of students being admitted with a median ACT/SAT composite of 1,055 and an average incoming GPA of 3.50 also help create an environment that is based upon a dedicated student population that sought good grades in high school and did well on standardized tests.

Maryville College could also examine its peer institutions to also see what programs they implement for their students to see if any of those programs could be beneficial at Maryville College. For instance, The College of Idaho and Spring Hill College have pretty significant under-represented populations on their campus, and since Maryville College is 3rd amongst the peers outlined in under-represented populations, there could be specific programs that the College of Idaho or Spring Hill College implements to better engage those under represented populations.

For further benchmarking of these institutions, looking at NSSE data would allow a more detailed look at actual campus practices, especially related to high impact practices, faculty culture and the academic culture on the campus and how that plays in creating an environment that truly supports student learning and a rigorous academic program that challenges and supports students to engage in the material and become self-authored, life-long learners in their educational experience.

References

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