



TheRPGroup



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Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness: Professional Development and Career Exploration

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About The RP Group

The RP Group is a nonprofit, nonpartisan team made up of a dedicated Board of Directors and staff, working together with a shared and resolute goal: to increase the success of California community colleges and beyond.

Mission:

- **Supports** equitable outcomes
- **Uplift** student voices
- **Empower** researchers and planners

Services:

- Research, evaluation, planning, professional development, and technical assistance
- Designed and conducted by CCC practitioners

Organization:

501(c)3 with roots as membership organization



Agenda

- 01** What IRPE Is and Why IRPE Matters to Classified Professionals
- 02** Practical Ways to Use Data in Your Role
- 03** How to Engage With Your IRPE Office
- 04** Careers in IRPE
- 05** Q&A / Discussion
- 06** Closing/Final Thoughts

Session Outcomes

We hope that participants will leave with:

- Clear understanding of how IRPE supports the institution
- Practical ways to use data in their roles
- Insight into IRPE career pathways
- Feeling that data and research are accessible, not intimidating

What IRPE Is and Why IRPE Matters to Classified Professionals



What Is Institutional Research?

Institutional research (IR) is the practice of systematically collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data within a higher education institution to support institutional planning, policy formation, and decision-making processes.

IRPE Professionals

Who Are They?

IRPE: **I**nstitutional **R**esearch, **P**lanning, and **E**ffectiveness

- College employees
 - Deans, Directors, Analysts
- Come from a variety of academic backgrounds
 - Psychology, sociology, math, science
- Work with all areas of the college
 - Instruction, student services, IT, business office
- Play a vital role in decision-making at all levels of the college
 - Institutional, Division, Department, Program

IRPE Professionals

What Do They Do?

- Identify information needs
 - Who needs what information
- Collect, analyze, interpret, and report data and information
 - Surveys, focus groups, reports, dashboards
- Plan and evaluate
 - Strategic planning, program review/evaluation
- Serve as stewards of data and information
 - Build and maintain databases
- Educate information producers, users, and consumers
 - Data coaching, research presentations
- Other duties as assigned
 - Accreditation, SLOs, grants

Why IRPE Matters to the Institution

- IRPE is the backbone of evidence-based decision-making across the college.
- How IRPE supports accreditation, strategic planning, program review, and compliance — all essential for institutional health and funding.
- The role IRPE plays in understanding student needs, improving services, and ensuring equitable outcomes.
- How IRPE helps leadership make informed choices that affect staffing, budgeting, scheduling, and student success initiatives.
- IRPE serves as a strategic partner rather than a behind-the-scenes data unit.

Examples: How Data Inform and Impact Campus Operations

Student services

Enrollment management

Facilities and operations

Budget and resource allocation



Why IRPE Matters to Classified Professionals



Role of Classified Professionals in Data Accuracy, Interpretation, and Implementation

- Can serve as the ***connective tissue*** between what's happening on the ground and what IRPE ultimately analyzes, reports, and uses to guide institutional decisions.
- Often **generate, manage, or interact with the data** IRPE relies on, which makes them essential contributors to data quality.
- Their **frontline experience gives context and meaning** to the numbers; they see patterns and needs that data alone can't reveal.
- Many classified professionals **already use data informally** (tracking student interactions, monitoring workflows, identifying bottlenecks), and IRPE can help formalize and strengthen that work.
- **Collaboration between IRPE and classified professionals** leads to better insights, more accurate reporting, and stronger institutional outcomes.
- Classified professionals should be **active partners** in institutional effectiveness, not passive recipients of reports.

Data Accuracy: Ensuring the foundation is solid

Classified professionals are frequently the first point of contact for the data that eventually becomes institutional metrics. Their work directly **shapes the quality of IRPE outputs**.

They contribute to accuracy by:

- **Entering and maintaining data** in SIS, CRM, scheduling platforms, etc.
- **Catching inconsistencies or errors** because they see patterns in real time (e.g., duplicate student records, missing forms, mis-coded services).
- **Providing context** that helps IRPE understand anomalies—such as staffing shortages, system outages, or procedural changes that affect data trends.
- **Following consistent processes** that ensure data is collected the same way across departments and over time.

In short: Accurate institutional data starts with the people doing the work every day.

Data Interpretation:

Adding meaning that numbers alone cannot provide

Even the cleanest dataset needs human insight. Classified professionals bring frontline experience that helps IRPE and leadership **interpret what the data actually means.**

They support interpretation by:

- **Explaining operational realities** behind trends (e.g., why wait times spiked, why certain forms are incomplete, why student traffic shifted).
- **Identifying emerging issues** before they show up in reports—because they see student behavior and workflow changes first.
- **Helping IRPE validate findings** by confirming whether patterns in the data match what is happening in practice.
- **Offering qualitative insights** that complement quantitative data, especially around student needs, service gaps, and process bottlenecks.

Classified professionals are key partners in turning raw data into actionable understanding.

Data Implementation:

Bringing insights to life in daily operations

Even the best analysis is useless if it does not translate into improved practice. Classified professionals are often the ones who **operationalize data-informed decisions**.

They support implementation by:

- **Adjusting workflows** based on data (e.g., reallocating staff during peak times, modifying intake procedures, updating communication practices).
- **Testing new processes** that IRPE or leadership recommends and providing feedback on what works.
- **Monitoring changes** to see whether interventions actually improve outcomes.
- **Communicating with students and colleagues** about new procedures or improvements driven by data.
- **Sustaining continuous improvement** by integrating data checks or dashboards into routine work.

Classified professionals serve as the bridge between institutional strategy and day-to-day execution.

Institutional Benefits to Engaged Classified Professionals

- More reliable data
- More meaningful insights
- More effective improvements
- Stronger alignment between IRPE and operational teams
- A culture where data are shared, understood, and acted upon

And importantly, being engaged empowers classified professionals to see themselves as **contributors to institutional effectiveness**, not just recipients of decisions.

Practical Ways to Use Data in Your Role



**Data are not
just for analysts**

**Data are a tool
you use every
day**

- Knowing key data sources (dashboards, reports, surveys, KPIs)
- Understanding common IRPE metrics
- Using data to:
 - Improve workflows
 - Identify service gaps
 - Support student success
 - Communicate needs to leadership
- Tips for collaborating with IRPE teams

Know Your Data Sources

Common sources you already use:

- Dashboards (enrollment, student success, equity metrics)
- Reports (program review, accreditation, annual updates)
- Surveys (student satisfaction, climate, event feedback)
- Operational logs (appointments, tickets, foot traffic)
- SIS data (demographics, course patterns, enrollment status, outcomes)

Takeaway: You interact with data more than you think.

Understanding Key Metrics

Useful IRPE metrics to recognize:

- Headcount vs. FTES
- Retention and persistence
- Course success rates
- Service utilization patterns
- Cycle times (processing, response, turnaround)
- Equity disaggregation across student groups

Takeaway: You don't need to be a statistician — focus on what the numbers represent.

Using Data to Improve Workflows

Data can help you:

- Identify peak service times
- Adjust staffing or scheduling
- Spot bottlenecks in processes
- Track turnaround times
- Reduce errors and rework
- Improve communication materials

Takeaway: Small data-informed tweaks can make your work smoother.

Using Data to Identify Service Gaps

Data can help you see where support is needed:

- Who is (and isn't) using your services
- Patterns in missed deadlines or repeated questions
- Times when wait times spike
- Tasks that consistently fall through the cracks

Takeaway: Data can turn “I think” into “I can show you.”

Using Data to Support Student Success

Use data to:

- Understand who you serve
- Tailor outreach and follow-up
- Track participation in workshops or services
- Identify students who may need extra support
- Monitor outcomes of interventions

Takeaway: Data can help you help students more effectively.

Using Data to Communicate Needs to Leadership

Data can strengthen your case for:

- Staffing adjustments
- Updated tools or technology
- Extended hours or new services
- Training or professional development
- Process improvements

Examples:

- "Student traffic increased 40% this term."
- "Response times doubled after staffing changes."
- "Students who attend our workshops persist at higher rates."

Collaborating with IRPE

Ways to partner with IRPE:

- Ask questions early when planning new processes
- Share context behind expected and unexpected patterns
- Request custom data for projects
- Participate in surveys and data collection
- Attend IRPE trainings to build skills

Takeaway: IRPE is a resource — use us.

Discussion

- What data do you already use in your role?
- What data do you *wish* you had?
- How could data make your work easier?



How to Engage With Your IRPE Office



When to Reach Out

Classified professionals don't need to wait for a formal project to connect with IRPE.

Good times to reach out include:

- **When you notice a pattern** in student behavior, service usage, or workflow issues
- **When you're planning a new process**, form, or service and want to ensure data are captured correctly
- **When you need numbers** to support a proposal, report, or request
- **When something in the data does not make sense**, and you want help interpreting it
- **When you want to understand trends** that affect your department's work

Key message: IRPE is there to help you ask deeper questions and make informed decisions.

What Information IRPE Can Provide

IRPE offices typically have access to a wide range of institutional data. They can help with:

- **Enrollment trends** (overall and by program, demographic group, or modality)
- **Student success metrics** (retention, persistence, completion, equity gaps)
- **Service utilization data** (appointments, tutoring, advising, financial aid traffic)
- **Survey results** (student satisfaction, climate, event feedback)
- **Operational metrics** (processing times, error rates, workflow patterns)
- **Custom data pulls** for specific projects or questions

Key message: If it touches students, services, or institutional performance, IRPE probably has data on it.

How to Request Data Effectively

A clear request helps IRPE respond faster and more accurately. Tips include:

- **Be specific about your question**
Instead of “I need data on students,” try “How many first-generation students used our front desk services last semester?”
- **Explain the purpose**
IRPE can tailor the data if they know the decision you are trying to make.
- **Define the timeframe**
(e.g., last term, last year, last three years)
- **Identify the population of interest**
(e.g., new students, returning students, students in a specific program)
- **Share any context** that might affect the data (system changes, staffing shifts, new procedures).

Key message: The clearer the question, the more useful the data.

Building a Collaborative Culture

Engaging with IRPE isn't just transactional — it's a partnership. You can help strengthen that relationship by:

- **Inviting IRPE to department meetings** when discussing data-related topics
- **Sharing frontline insights** that help IRPE interpret trends
- **Participating in surveys and data collection efforts** to improve response rates
- **Providing feedback** on dashboards or reports so IRPE can make them more user-friendly
- **Asking for training** on data literacy, dashboards, or metrics

Key message: IRPE is most effective when we work closely with the people doing the day-to-day work.

What IRPE Needs From You

IRPE relies on classified professionals for:

- **Accurate data entry**
- **Consistent processes** that ensure data quality
- **Contextual information** about operational changes and on-the-ground experience
- **Feedback** on whether data-informed changes are working
- **Questions and curiosity** that help IRPE understand what the campus needs

Key message: You're not just a data user — you're a data partner.

Benefits of Engaging With IRPE

When classified professionals and IRPE collaborate, the institution gains:

- Better data quality
- More meaningful insights
- Stronger student support
- More efficient workflows
- More effective resource allocation
- A culture of continuous improvement

Key message: Engaging with IRPE makes your work easier and strengthens the entire institution.

Careers in IRPE



Skills Needed

- Analytical thinking
- Data literacy and visualization
- Research methods and statistics
- Communication and storytelling with data
- Project management and collaboration

Entry Points

- Entry-level research assistant roles
- Analyst positions
- Opportunities for internal transitions from classified roles
- Transferable skills that many classified professionals already have

Learning Opportunities

Growth Trajectories

- Professional development (RP Group, CAIR, AIR)
 - On-campus training and mentorship
 - Free or low-cost online learning (data literacy, Excel, Power BI, R, Python, research methods)
 - Building a portfolio of data projects
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- Analyst → Senior Analyst → Director of IRPE
 - Specialization paths (assessment, planning, accreditation, data science)
 - Leadership opportunities in institutional effectiveness and strategic planning



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So, how did we get to IRPE?

| Non-linear paths

Q&A / Discussion

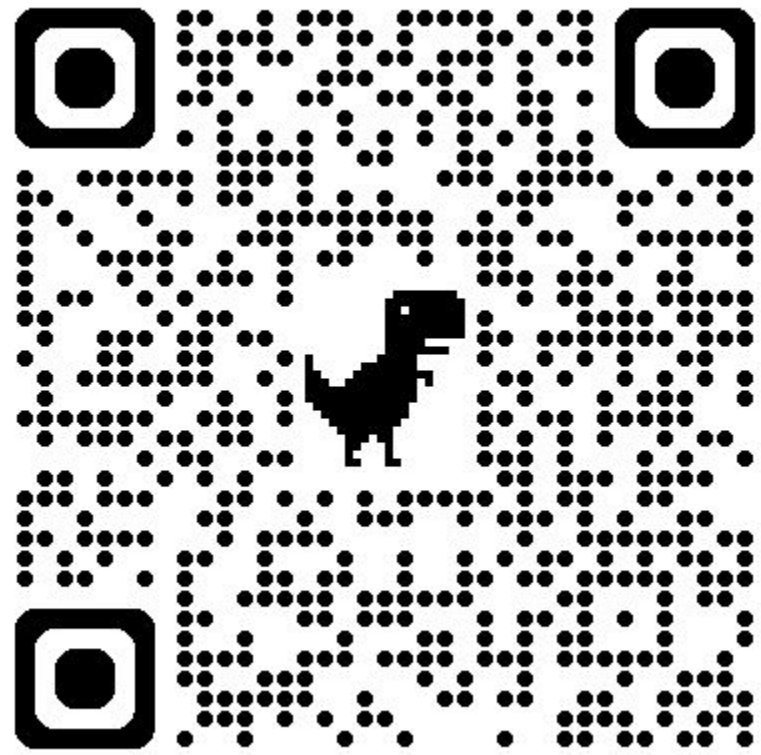
Key Takeaways



Resources



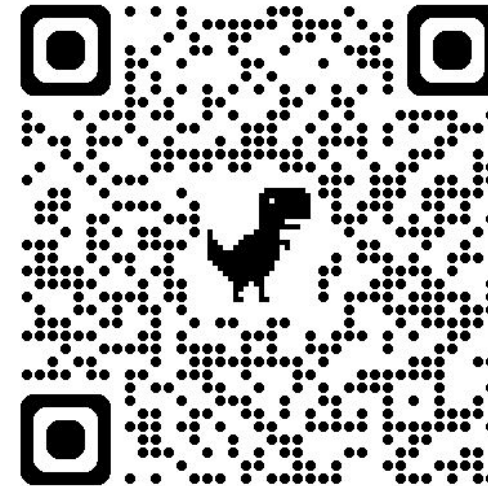
Professional Development



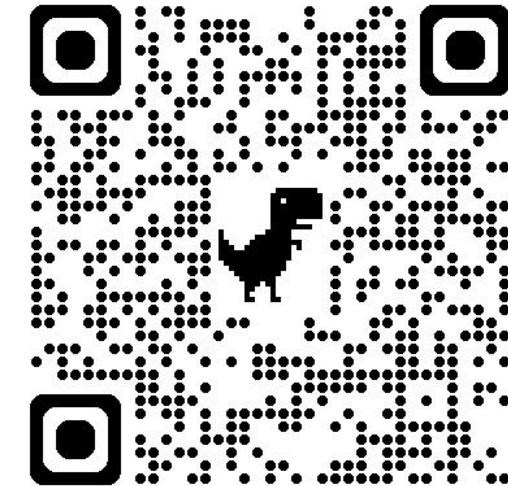
- PIER to PIER
- Equity Research and Social Justice Collaborative
- RP Conference
- Strengthening Student Success Conference
- Leading from the Middle
- Strategic Enrollment Management

How to Get More Information

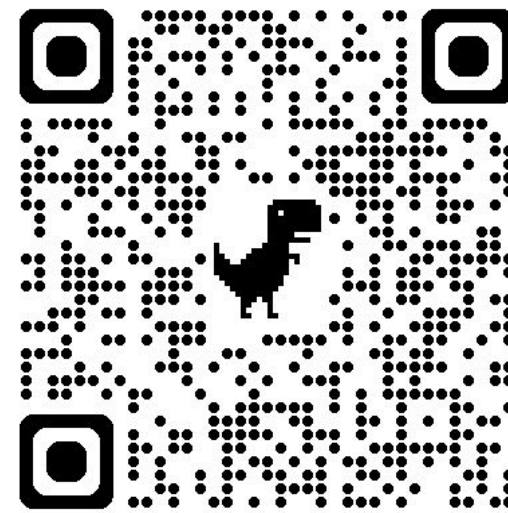
Super Brief



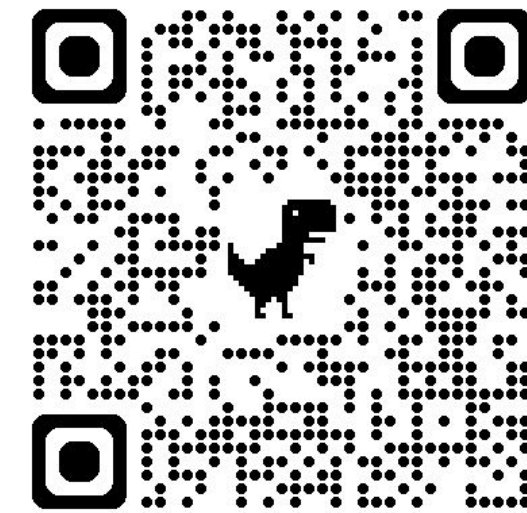
Listservs



Jobs in the Field



IRPE Onboarding
Canvas Course



Thank You!

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