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Is Outsourcing Student Success the Future of Higher Education?

Chicago, Illinois – December 19, 2017 - Higher education has engaged in a bewildering succession of reform efforts to improve institutional performance and student success in higher education since the 1960s, with little success. After more than fifty years of seeking solutions internally, colleges and universities are turning more and more to external, for-profit firms to find solutions for them—raising important questions about the mission and the future of higher education.

The history of institutional research provides an important perspective on the inability of higher education executives to deliver fully on the promise of data-driven decision-making at American colleges and universities. Since its inception in the early twentieth century, the institutional research profession has sought to advance modern management techniques, data analytics, and knowledge about what works for college student success. The profession's struggle to spur reform has contributed to the ongoing crisis in US higher education and the recent turn to outsourcing student success solutions to private sector vendors of data science.

Outsourcing Student Success, an independent and critical analysis of the history of institutional research in higher education administration, explores the progress of the profession from the early twentieth century to the present. Published by Historia|Research Press, the book critically examines the stagnation of institutional research during the past fifty years and the culture of non-accountability that rose in opposition to forestall scientific research on higher education. The narrative delivers a cautionary tale for those carrying forward the mantle of higher education reform and reveals to policymakers, administrators, faculty, students, and families reasons why the data that institutions collect, analyze, and publicize have not advanced college student success adequately.

Joseph H. Wycoff, PhD, is an independent scholar and consultant who has worked in academic, market, and institutional research during the past twenty-five years, including fifteen years in higher education. He holds a doctorate in US history with an emphasis on business and consumer history. His institutional research background features professional experience in three sectors of higher education: a community college, a private nonprofit institution, and a Research I university, the University of Washington where he earned his doctorate. He has presented independent scholarship for the Society for Social Science History, Business History Conference, New England Historical Association, and Historians of the Early American Republic.

“This work has given me an opportunity to bring together my training as a professional historian and my experience as an institutional researcher in higher education,” Dr. Wycoff shared. “Scholars largely have neglected the origins of institutional research from the effort to apply scientific principles to the study of college administration and the role early

professionals in the field played in the movement to democratize higher education as advocated by the 1946 Truman Commission. For the past fifty years, the profession has been hamstrung by the notion that it is an administrative ‘function’ and unable to become a discipline in the traditional sense.”

Dr. Wycoff’s engaging narrative reveals that the organization and recent literature for the profession are deeply flawed, and he shares his provocative observations about the history of research on higher education in *Outsourcing Student Success*.

If colleges and universities do not reverse the decline in their institutional research capacities, more and more institutions will look to for-profit vendors of data science and other solution providers for college student success. His book serves to inform university leaders, policymakers, data scientists, faculty, institutional researchers, students, and parents about the history of institutional research—the professional field once heralded for its potential to strategically use data for the modernization of higher education administration. Through the prism of institutional research literature, many higher education innovators and disruptors will gain a better grasp of the culture of non-accountability that exists among opponents to data-driven decision-making on American college campuses.

Outsourcing Student Success: The History of Institutional Research and the Future of Higher Education is available from Amazon.com, bookstores, and other online retailers.

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