Data User's Guide

The Catholic Identity Mission Assessment Project

The core philosophy of the CIMA project is that data should be used for "improving, not proving." Improvement efforts are well served by thoughtful reflection on evidence about the experience of students in relation to the stated goals of the institution. The CIMA project provides the opportunity to bring such evidence to bear in particular regarding the institution's Catholic identity. Collecting, analyzing and discussing the evidence are enhanced by a collective effort shared across Catholic higher education. This shared effort creates three benefits:

1. Resources from a wide range of institutions have been devoted to development of the survey instruments and measures.
2. Costs of administering the surveys are reduced through economy of scale.
3. Data collected from students and alums at individual campuses can be situated in reference to other data.

While clearly bringing benefits to individual campuses, the collective nature of the shared effort also entails responsibilities to the other campuses involved. The purpose of this document is to outline those responsibilities so that participating institutions can uphold the common good while maximizing their own assessment endeavors.

Carefully collected survey data based on valid and reliable measures should result in an informative profile of the population surveyed. The meaning of that profile, however, often requires context. CIMA emphasizes five reference points to discern the full implications of evidence of student experience:

1. How do the data look in relation to what our institution says it is striving to accomplish?
2. How do the data about our students and alums look now in relation to what we have seen about them in the past?
3. How do our students and alums look now compared to how they looked at a previous point in their experience with the institution (at the point of graduation vis-à-vis at entry)?
4. How do our campus's data look in relation to the larger picture of Catholic higher education?
5. How do our campus's data look in relation to the larger picture of the spiritual development of the surveys' target populations?

The language used here intentionally avoids use of the concepts of comparison and benchmarking. The practice of comparing is commonly framed as ranking, if not in the fully ordinal sense of who's first, etc., at least in the sense of "better than" or "worse than." Rankings, however, provide very little insight into *effectiveness* and tend to dilute "improvement" so that it means nothing more than "ranking higher than previously." It is quite possible that all institutions are doing well (or poorly) or that, given the developmental stage of our students, growth may involve what appears temporarily to be backsliding. Furthermore, "benchmarking" implies an external standard that defines best practice. Unlike most survey-based student assessment projects, the CIMA survey suite does not assert pre-defined standards in the targeted assessment domain, in this case, what it means to be Catholic or how Catholic identity should be enacted. Institutions define those standards for themselves. The content areas of the surveys were developed based on reviews of existing mission statements in U.S. Catholic higher education.

CIMA data and reports, therefore, are not intended for comparing individual institutions to each other in any form of ranking. Nor are they intended to compare individual institutions or aggregated reporting groups to pre-defined standards of Catholicity. Any use of the data which intentionally or unintentionally presents such comparisons to any audience is unacceptable. Catholic institutions of higher education that use CIMA data in ways inconsistent with the guidelines articulated herein will be contacted by ACCU to determine the causes and implications of the breach of acceptable use. The results of this determination may affect an institution's future participation in CIMA surveys.

Assessment for improvement demands that institutions envision indicators of progress toward their goals, then use evidence from students' reflections on their experience to make changes to achieve those goals. To be sure, assessment efforts must address a much broader range of issues than student experience (see *Institutional Assessment Principles for Catholic Identity and Mission Achievement* for additional resources). Within this Guide, the discussion focuses specifically on student and alumni/ae survey data.

Use of the CIMA Name, Acronym, Logo and Data

Any institution participating in data collection through the Catholic Identity Mission Assessment project has permission to use the project title, acronym and logo in reports and presentations related to that data collection. When the acronym or logo are used in printed materials, the full title ("Catholic Identity Mission Assessment") should be included at first usage. First usage should also include the phrase "CIMA is a subsidiary of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU). ACCU members participate voluntarily in collective efforts to gather data for the purposes of assessing Catholic identity and institutional mission."

CIMA data are collected through surveys, the Intent to Participate Form and contact lists. ACCU is the custodian of the national research database, holding it in common for the good of all participating institutions and of Catholic higher education as a whole. As custodian, ACCU has access to individually and institutionally unmasked data and is bound by the confidentiality and data security commitments which are articulated in the human subjects protocols submitted for each survey administration. These can be found at www.accunet.org/CIMA.

Each participating institution is the owner of all data collected from its current or former students or supplied by the institution in the contact information file. The institution has access to unmasked unit record responses to survey questions for its own participants, including student IDs and names. The institution is bound by the confidentiality and data security commitments which are articulated in the human subjects protocols with which it abides as indicated on the Intent to Participate Form. All data files received by participating institutions are intended for use by that institution alone and may not be re-distributed further, either wholly or partially. Any inadvertent redistribution of CIMA data, including as a result of data security breaches, should be reported to the ACCU Vice President immediately upon discovery.

The essential distinction, therefore, defining acceptable use of CIMA data on a given campus is

between the participating institution's data and the data from other institutions which are used for context reference. The participating institution is responsible for the following:

- Maintain confidentiality of individually identifiable data
- Use caution when presenting disaggregated data of fewer than five cases and other presentations whereby individual identity may be inferred indirectly
- Identify CIMA as the data source, as described previously
- Determine appropriate use and labeling of its own data, internally and for public release
- Safeguard the use of context reference data distributed to administrative internal audiences (see below for further definition of "administrative internal audiences")
- Safeguard the disclosure of the names of institutions included in context reference groups, which is allowed for administrative internal audiences under certain conditions

It is **unacceptable** for the participating institution to

- Disseminate context reference data to audiences other than those described herein
- Make statements to the public describing any measures of its students in terms of ranked order compared to context reference groups or individual institutions.
- Distribute CIMA data in any format to any audience that risks compromising institutions', groups' or individuals' right to confidentiality and privacy, whether the CIMA name is associated with the data or not.

Participating institutions may enter into agreements with no fewer than four other participating institutions to share their unit-level data with each other. Data must be de-identified at the unit level (stripped of email address and individual ID) and may be shared in the following two formats:

- Masked and coded. All institutions will be assigned a code (Campus A, Campus B, etc.). All institutions receiving the data will know which code has been assigned to their own data, but will not know which codes were assigned to the other institutions. It is acceptable to name the other schools in the agreement, without attachment to their codes.
- Unmasked. The data set will include named institutional identifiers.

It is acceptable for data-sharing institutions to share aggregated context reference data with administrative internal audiences according to whichever agreement they entered (masked/coded or unmasked). This includes breakdowns not provided in standard reporting, such as by gender and race/ethnicity or by traditional/non-traditional student status. It is unacceptable to do so beyond those audiences. All other stipulations for the acceptable and unacceptable use of CIMA data apply to shared data agreements.

Any presentation of context reference data should be labeled, "Confidential: Do not reproduce or share without permission from [provide name of campus CIMA contact person and office]." Questions regarding these guidelines on the use and management of CIMA data or use of the CIMA name should be directed to the Vice President of ACCU. See below for contact information.

Guidelines on Presentation of CIMA Data under Standard Release Conditions

Type of Use	Administrative Internal Audiences[1]	Campus-at-large and Public Distribution[2]
School's own individually identifiable data	Campus determination	Unacceptable
School's own data in aggregated reports	Acceptable	Acceptable
Context reference data	Acceptable	Unacceptable
Names of institutions in a context reference group	Acceptable	Unacceptable

Additional Guidelines on Presentation of CIMA Data under Data Sharing Conditions

Type of Use	Administrative Internal Audiences	Campus-at-large and Public Distribution
Masked/Coded data	Acceptable	Unacceptable
Names of institutions in a masked data sharing group	Acceptable	Unacceptable
Unmasked data (named schools)	Acceptable under an unmasked agreement	Unacceptable

1. Administrative Internal Audiences include role-defined individuals who, by virtue of their position within the institution, are charged with high level administration of the institution. This includes positions such as presidents; chief academic, admissions, mission, and student affairs officers; directors of strategic planning, institutional research, assessment, and public relations; and academic deans. By extension, this group also includes members of accreditation committees, visiting accreditors and accrediting agency staff. Typically the accrediting agency representatives sign non-disclosure agreements in order to view confidential institutional information. Campuses may also extend this group to include groups such as faculty governance and other leadership committees, ad hoc review and policy advisory committees, residence life staff, finance office staff, and financial aid office staff. Extension to these other campus personnel adds a layer of caution when disseminating CIMA data so as to make sure that the data are not inadvertently made public.

2. Due to the ease of reproduction of disseminated materials, either print copy or electronic, distribution to campus-at-large groups is considered the same as distribution to the public. The Campus-at-large group includes campus or school-based organizations with responsibilities that are not exclusively campus governance. This might include constituencies that are normally informed about critical administrative decisions but do not directly participate in decision-making. A key criterion might be that members of this group have a conflict between keeping data confidential and reporting to peers within and outside of their group.

Suggestions for Using CIMA Survey Results for Institutional Assessment

Which elements of your mission statement could be informed by data collected through this survey?

What information in the Institutional Report fills significant gaps in your institution's knowledge about the target population?

How do the results of this administration of the survey compare to previous results? What could account for the changes?

Which findings suggest areas of strength? How can the campus acknowledge those strengths and continue to ensure their endurance?

Which findings suggest areas for improvement? Which offices or programs are in the best position to identify and act on changes needed to improve institutional effectiveness in those areas?

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For additional information, direct questions to
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