Data Governance

Be honest: We've all been in meetings where the five people attending have 4-5 different values for a certain metric under discussion. Even the simplest question – "how many students do we have?" – can be confounded by different definitions of a "student." So if your eyes glazed over when you saw the term "Data Governance", read on . . . because despite its somewhat insipid name, picture instead a dynamic, user-centered process of continuous improvement that gives life to data and is designed to enrich its value to GMHEC members.

Data governance (DG) is a key supporting element in any organization, but is especially important in GMHEC's new world of shared information systems in the areas of human resources, finance, advancement (and eventually our student-related departments and functions). Like information technology, which provides the infrastructure and technical support for our new systems, and the work being done by our stakeholder relations team to help our people manage and adapt to changes in myriad business processes, data governance also supports these functional areas by creating a consistent framework and defined processes for managing our data assets.

The concept of data as an "asset" to an organization is somewhat new. We traditionally think of assets as tangible or even intangible items that can be assigned a monetary value, and listed on our institutional balance sheets – such as cash, property and equipment, or our endowment. Yet data is perhaps one of our more valuable strategic assets, though it can't typically be measured in monetary terms. More importantly, its value actually increases with use – as we encourage decision-makers to explore their data, moving beyond everyday operational questions to more strategic questions and richer analytics. So creating a framework that includes data quality, data management procedures, data policies, and risk management in relation to our key data assets is absolutely critical to maximizing the effectiveness of the three schools in the GMHEC.

Another guiding principle of the consortium is efficiency. By adopting standardized data definitions and practices across all three colleges and the consortium itself, we can improve our ability to access key data and to increase trust in that data. If campus conversations currently spin into data reconciliation discussions about which count of students is "right," developing the metadata for our common core data elements and managing those in a shared data catalog will bring those discussions to a new level, as we'll spend less time researching discrepancies due to differing data definitions, and instead focus on key strategic questions. While these questions will naturally differ across colleges, campuses, and departments, having clean, reliable, and

clearly understood data provides a solid foundation for both strategic and operational discussions and decisions at all levels.

The consortium's DG team was formally chartered earlier this year and has been working closely with the advancement, human resources, and finance teams to develop data standards for key data elements in those systems – and to coordinate with other teams when data elements cross systems. Our next steps include scoping and selection of a data catalog system. While there are several subprojects within our overall GMHEC DG "project," Data Governance is actually an ongoing program that will exist and evolve in parallel with our shared use of Oracle and Blackbaud system for years to come.

Please reach out to any of your DG local leads for more information: Diana Matot (GMHEC DG Project Lead, Champlain), Mary Jane Russell (GMHEC Steering Committee DG Rep, Saint Michael's), Adela Langrock (DG Lead, Middlebury).

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