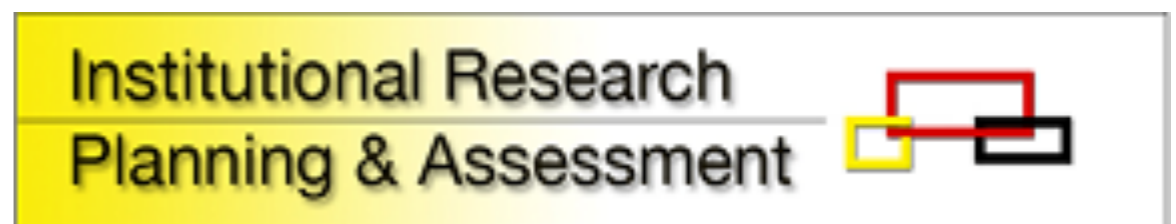# The Road Taken: Charting a Critical Path for IR in a Large Research Institution

Mona Levine
Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment
University of Maryland

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost, *The Road Not Taken*

The Road Taken

Establish a critical path that:

- Aligns with strategic directions of the University
- Uses non-traditional management approaches

The Road Taken

Non-traditional management approaches

- Breaks traditional span of control and supervisory structures
- Builds entrepreneurial capacity
- Trains research and assessment staff across the campus

The Road Taken

- Suggestions for Success

- Responding to Rejection

University of Maryland

The University of Maryland

- Located in a suburb of Washington, DC
- 26,826 undergraduate students:
  38% minority, 76% Maryland residents
- 10,808 graduate students:
  21% minority, 26% foreign
- 4000 faculty; 1500 tenure-tenure track

The University of Maryland

- $545 million in research funding
- 102 undergraduate majors
- #17 among public institutions in U.S News and World Report undergraduate rankings
- No medical or law school
- Land grant and flagship institution

Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment (IRPA)

- 13 Analysts, 1 Data Manager
- 3 Graduate Assistants
- 4 Undergraduate Student Worker
- Traditional IR activities (data development, reporting, surveys)
- Less traditional activities
  - Faculty activity reporting
  - Course evaluation
  - Learning Outcomes Assessment

Perspective of an Outsider

- Didn't grow up in a research university
- Didn't grow up in IR

BUT

- Inherited a structure and commitment to campus involvement
- Came as an alum and parent

Strategic direction of the university

- Driving force and functional lead for new systems
  - Faculty activity reporting
  - Course evaluation
  - New open source student system

Nontraditional Management Approaches

- Break traditional span of control and supervisory structure
  - Formal loan: two staff on 50% time for development of new student information system
  - Informal loan: one staff member provides one-on-one assistance to the Provost's Chief of Staff on sensitive policy issues

Nontraditional Management Approaches

- Build entrepreneurial capacity
  - Partnered to conduct a major stakeholders study with University Relations and an outside firm
  - Assessment expertise leveraged into program, campus, regional and national grants

Nontraditional Management Approaches

- Train research and assessment staff across the campus
  - Assist "staffs of one" in undergraduate admissions, the graduate school and the business school
  - Give "affiliate" status: attend staff meetings, develop joint conference proposals

Results in improved data consistency and building collaborations

Suggestions for Success

- Hire great staff, then cede control of their day-to-day activities

- Aspire to be a campus player and not always the project lead

- Build relationships across campus through formal participation in committees and informal relationships based on individual staff interests

Suggestions for Success

- Challenge your staff, but don't overwhelm them

- Determine when the office needs external resources and funding to participate and when it is in your interest to provide services without compensation
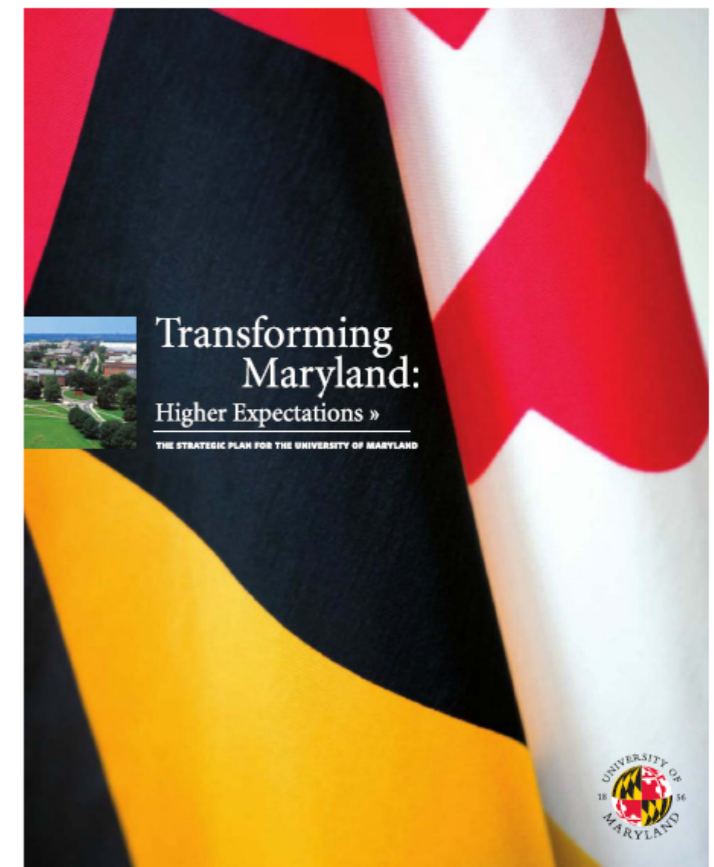
Responding to Rejection

- Acknowledge that substantial prep work may not be used

- Address morale issues promptly; don't let them fester

Transforming Maryland: Higher Expectations »
THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Poster Child

Michelle Appel

More Info

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