In an era of big data, there seems to be more data, yet fewer answers, in all industries and sectors. No group of organizations has really figured out how make the most effective and efficient use of data—yet. Additionally, employees across the board, from analysts to senior leaders, are dissatisfied with their current data access, the wait time for results, and the complexity of completing ostensibly simple reports, to name but a few areas in need of improvement.

Available in November on Amazon.
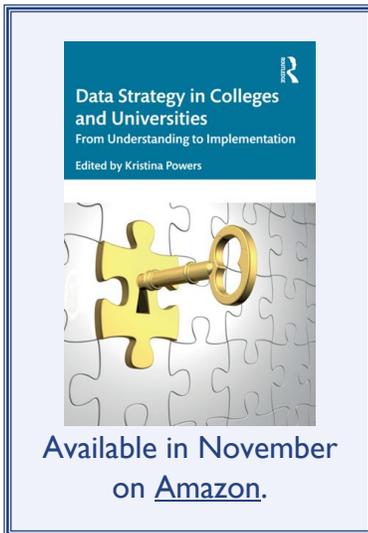
To this dissatisfaction with current data conditions we bring an optimism that it is possible to leverage improved tactics and new technology. To put it bluntly, there has to be a better way to manage this data chaos. While there are plenty of books and articles devoted to either data *or* strategy, this is the first to address the two combined—data strategy—in the context of higher education. Any group that is the first to publicly share their thoughts, ideas, and research on a topic takes pride in advancing new knowledge but acknowledges that their efforts are only the beginning and that much work remains to be done. This is true of the 20 authors across 13 colleges, universities, and organizations who contributed to this book.

Authors' Aim and Book Organization

The authors aim to help institutional leaders understand and implement a data strategy at their college or university, to maximize benefits to all data users and creators. Exploring key considerations in the development of an effective data strategy, this book brings together professionals with different higher education experiences and perspectives, including faculty, administrators, and experts in institutional research, information technology (IT), and student affairs. Each chapter focuses on critical elements of a data strategy and concludes with key discussion questions that can be used in graduate courses, around the conference table, or with boards of trustees.

The book is broken down into three parts:

Part I: Structure – Since having a data strategy is not yet commonplace in colleges and universities, the first four chapters (Part I) contextualize and explain the topic. These chapters are purposefully designed to build on readers' existing knowledge about strategic planning and data use to educate them about data strategy. Chapter 1 focuses on why colleges and universities should care about creating a data strategy and the advantages of having one.

Chapter 2 discusses the components of a data strategy so that institutions can utilize one or more common models when creating their own.

Chapter 3 explores strategic planning as it relates to data strategy and helps readers connect familiar strategic planning topics to an unfamiliar data strategy. Institutions may already have an IT plan and wonder if a data strategy is the same thing. Chapter 4 discusses the drastic differences between a data strategy and an IT plan—and advocates that both are crucial.

Part II: Implementation – While some individuals have a good vision for change, effectively implementing ideas may be more difficult. The three chapters in Part II give readers clear steps and tactics for implementing a data strategy. Chapter 5 explains how to leverage existing information so that colleges and universities can use what they already have first. Certain departments may have data strategy elements in their existing departmental plans.

Since an honest self-appraisal of current institutional planning efforts can yield both key insights into pain points and possible solutions, Chapter 6 provides detailed steps for performing this process. Creating a data strategy will be challenging for most institutions because they have not completed the process before. Recognizing this fact, Chapter 7 addresses the issues that may be preventing the institution from naturally moving forward.

Part III: Perspectives – A person's perspective is their reality. Since understanding different versions of reality can be useful in creating and advancing a data strategy, Part III explores the perspectives of five different groups of data users and providers and the different challenges they face. Chapter 8 focuses on presidents and provosts, who have enormous responsibilities and need accurate and timely data to meet internal decision making and external audience demands.

Chapter 9 looks at faculty, who both create data and constantly use disparate qualitative and quantitative information to assess student learning and improve academic programs.

Students are the largest group of decision-makers at a college or university. Providing them with tools and information to make informed decisions is critical and does not happen by accident. Supporting student success requires both a thorough understanding of the particular student population involved and the simultaneous collaboration of multiple departments.

> "Data Strategy in Colleges and Universities makes a compelling case for the importance of thinking about how to integrate data with planning efforts at postsecondary institutions. Readers will enjoy the mix of theoretical concepts and practical advice for how to achieve this goal . . . The book should be a must-read for any institution that struggles with how to produce the information needed for effective strategic planning."
>
> Robert K. Toutkoushian
> Professor, University of Georgia, Institute of Higher Education
> Editor, Research in Higher Education

Chapter 10 addresses the challenges student affairs leaders must navigate as consumers of data. Chapter 11 is devoted to institutional researchers, who are typically responsible for providing data to internal and external stakeholders. Finally, Chapter 12 turns to IT analysts, who often play a critical role in collecting the data and in some cases extracting the data from data systems for use by decision-makers.

Added Value to the Field of Higher Education

The 20 authors who contributed to this book are passionate about higher education (as you will see when reading their biographies). We are all committed to strengthening colleges and universities and, even more importantly, student success. It is these shared interests and values that have brought us together to create this book, which has the following benefits:

> " . . . [The] authors provide unique insights and practical recommendations into a modern problem. I wish every higher education leader in this country would read this book and establish a data strategy before investing more institutional resources into data analytics."
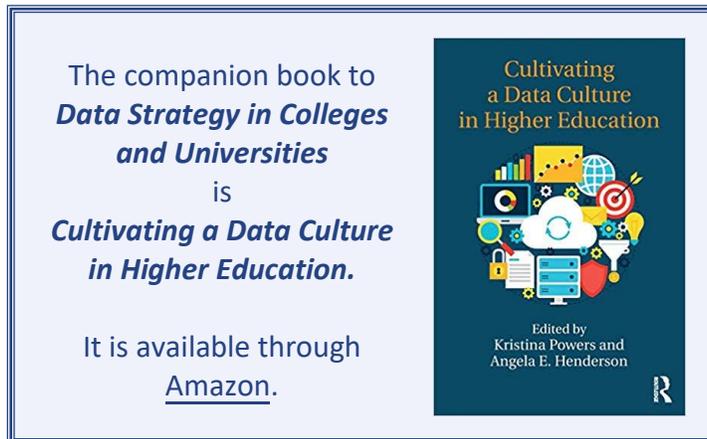>
> P. Daniel Chen
> Associate Professor, George Mason University

- It meets a growing and unmet need for guidance on effectively managing data resources so that the all data users and providers are collectively working toward the same institutional goals rather than taking separate, fragmented approaches.
- It is the first book in the higher education sector to focus on creating a data strategy.
- Its chapters are written from different perspectives of leaders within higher education, making it relevant to a large segment of readers.
- Many business-related books in this field target chief information officers with IT strategies for using big data. This book goes beyond the role of the CIO and big data, weaving together fragmented, department-level data strategies into a cohesive institutional data strategy.
- Each chapter includes discussion questions that can be used by faculty in graduate courses or by senior leaders (executives, boards of trustees, committees, etc.) for planning.

Companion Book on Data Culture

It is nearly impossible to discuss data strategy without discussing data culture. While data culture is at least alluded to in every chapter, it is not the focus of this book. Data culture is a large enough topic to deserve its own separate book—and one exists. Those who are serious about creating a data strategy for their institution may wish to consult *Cultivating a Data Culture in Higher Education* (edited by K. Powers and A. Henderson).

Since most institutions have already established a data culture, *Cultivating a Data Culture in Higher Education* focuses on improvement. With the rapidly expanded use of data across institutions, different data cultures have developed organically—some positive, others less so.

The companion book to
Data Strategy in Colleges and Universities
is
Cultivating a Data Culture in Higher Education.

It is available through
Amazon.

Senior leaders have recognized this discourse and need to shape the culture. *Cultivating a Data Culture in Colleges and Universities* identifies ways in which institutions can foster a collaborative, forward-moving data-driven environment centered on people.

Very few colleges or universities have created an institutional data strategy. Leaders thus have an exciting opportunity to shape this undertaking without having to contend with historical precedents or previous experiences. *Data Strategy in Colleges and Universities* focuses on the *work* of data creators and requests by data users to promote a planned and purposeful effort that is directly tied to strategic goals. This book helps leaders tackle many frustrating problems with a single solution: the creation of a data strategy.

Enjoy and Share

We hope that you enjoy the book and that it will be of use to you in developing a data strategy at your institution. Readers are invited to reach out and share their experiences of creating a data strategy. This information will be used to highlight successes and address challenges in future publications and presentations.

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