An investigation of the impact that the office of institutional research and planning has on presidential decision-making at Atlanta University

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Atlanta University

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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE IMPACT THAT THE OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AND PLANNING HAS ON PRESIDENTIAL DECISION-MAKING AT ATLANTA UNIVERSITY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

ATLANTA, GEORGIA DECEMBER, 1976
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INTRODUCTION

The most crucial decisions in higher education stem from a lack of research which is directed toward providing data useful or necessary in the making of intelligent administrative decisions. Historically, college and university administrators have made decisions in a vacuum and this is particularly true in the case of black institutions.

Too often, the absence of research has resulted in the squandering of resources and poor planning within institutions. Administrators recognize that the day has gone when major decisions can be made on "hunches" or "guesses". Therefore, it has become increasingly clear that assistance is needed in the development and implementation of a management information system that will help the administrator in making institutional decisions and improving planning processes.

Currently, the trend among administrators in higher education is to utilize accurate information that serves as a guide and aids in determining the future of an institution. This information directly impinges upon the planning, management, and decision-making functions of a college or university.

The decision-making process in higher education has become more sophisticated due to the implementation of Institutional Research and Planning. As a profession, Institutional Research and Planning is geared toward systematically
collecting and analyzing data that is related to the operation of all phases of an institution. This paper will investigate the impact that the Office of Institutional Research and Planning has on presidential decision-making at Atlanta University.

In addition to focusing upon the impact that this office has had on presidential decision-making, an examination will be made of the functions and duties of this office, especially as they relate to a small black college. The projected thrust of this office in the future will also be discussed and recommendations will be made as to how Institutional Research and Planning can be more fully utilized to improve the quality of the decision-making process, at this University.

As an administrative intern in The Office of Institutional Research and Planning, it was recognized that Atlanta University had some severe management problems. One of the most difficult problems centered around decision-making.

Thus, an examination of the extent to which Institutional Research and Planning influences presidential decision-making at this institution was viewed as being a worthwhile and challenging degree project.

In order to accurately measure the role of Institutional Research and Planning with respect to presidential decision-making, a questionnaire was devised. It is significant to note that the President was the only person interviewed,
because he utilized this office more than any other administrator during the course of the internship.

From the interview with Dr. Jarrett, some of his responses shed light on the fact that many of this institution's problems stemmed from a lack of a Management Information System upon which to make decisions. It was also alluded from this interview that the Office of Institutional Research and Planning was deemed as being a viable mechanism that could help to alleviate some of Atlanta University's management problems, especially as they related to decision-making.

It was assessed from this interview that the President perceived the Office of Institutional Research and Planning as being a means of developing a Management Information System which would give him some direction in terms of decision-making and planning.

Various sources regarding Institutional Research and Planning are referred to throughout this paper. The day-to-day experiences helped immensely in formulating ideas and getting a vivid idea of the roles and duties of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning. Recommendations that were made in this paper for greater utilization of Institutional Research and Planning were based on the literature, the day-to-day experiences, and the in-depth interview with the President of Atlanta University.

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CHAPTER I

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AND PLANNING
AS A PROFESSION: ITS FUNCTIONS AND DUTIES

Institutions of higher learning aim to achieve a quality level of education. The quality of education that is delivered by an institution is contingent upon the decisions that are made. Administrators are cognizant of the fact that in order to arrive at important decisions, they must consult research to ascertain answers to basic questions.

In various articles and journals, Institutional Research and Planning is described as providing administrators with accurate information upon which to make decisions. It is a management tool for improving administrative decision-making in higher education.

Institutional Research and Planning is not regarded as the ordinary or common form of educational research:

"Institutional Research is a special kind of educational research in colleges and universities focused on the institution, and its products are largely directed toward academic planning and administrative activities. While institutional research may be more goal directed than most educational research, there are no inherent, obstacles which prevent it from generating new concepts. Arguments as to whether institutional research is applied or pure research have little practical significance for it is neither one nor the other and inevitably will involve a lot of both." 1

1 Sidney Suslow, A Declaration On Institutional Research (Tallahassee: Association for Institutional Research, £19727), p. 17.

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As a profession, Institutional Research and Planning is by no means a bureau of educational research designed primarily for answering questionnaires. Instead, it is a variegated form of organizational self-study created for colleges and universities. It projects a chart of the future of an institution by evaluating the possibility of attaining realistic goals.

There is no question that Institutional Research and Planning is an administrative function. It is an information center that serves as the stimulus for rational decision-making. To date, Institutional Research and Planning is the most recent profession in higher education, and its incursion on the predominately black campus is even more recent.

In previous years, these institutions have not had the benefit of this management tool, and unfortunately, many black institutions of higher learning have suffered consequences, due to this deprivation.

"Black institutions have lacked an accurate information base upon which to make viable decisions that would benefit the institution, its faculty, and its students. Lack of this information base has not been primarily the fault of the administrator, but rather due to the perpetual shortage of operating funds."²

Despite these economic constraints, administrators in black institutions were aware that they needed to have access to an information system to provide them with the kinds of creative, viable, and progressive decisions that were requisite to providing quality education.

Financial assistance from foundations and the Title III Higher Education Act for Institutional Research enabled many black colleges and universities to establish Offices of Institutional Research and Planning. Even in cases where funds were not allocated, many of the top administrators in black colleges and universities took the initiative and created Offices of Institutional Research and Planning.

For the most part, Institutional Research and Planning has proven to be beneficial and administrators consider it a vital function when making decisions.

According to the 1975-76 Association for Institutional Research Directory, there are six-hundred-fifty-three (653) Offices of Institutional Research and Planning on American college and university campuses. Of the one-hundred-six (106) predominately black colleges and universities, fifty-seven (57) have Office of Institutional Research and Planning. This means that over half (53.7%) of black institutions of higher learning have such offices.
There are several factors that led to the creation of The Office of Institutional Research and Planning at Atlanta University.

First, administrators within the University understood that the market for higher education in this country was changing and that adjustments had to be made to assure that Atlanta University would not find itself in great distress, due to declining enrollment and escalating costs.

Secondly, when the President was asked to comment on what factors led to the creation of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning at Atlanta University, he responded by saying that, "it became increasingly clear to him that decisions which affected the University, especially with respect to future growth and quality of education would have to become more systematized."

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning was implemented to assist in solving some of the major decisions facing the administration. Further, there existed a need for the development of an information system which administrators could use in improving current operations and in long range planning. There also existed a need to:
1. Conduct research activity for the improvement of counseling, instructional and placement services.

2. Compile data necessary to guide management decisions.

3. Perform information flow analyses and information surveys necessary for the development of Atlanta University's portion of the Centerwide Management Information System.

4. Develop an information system which administrators could use in improving current operations and in long-range planning.

There were other factors that led to the development of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning at Atlanta University. Among these being, foundations that awarded money to the University strongly recommended that the University develop a better process of decision-making and planning.

Atlanta University was not alone in terms of having management problems: Many colleges and universities are still in a dilemma and are being pressured from the outside to plan more wisely and make more accurate decisions, based upon data which reflects the condition of the university at any given period of time.

"Policy makers are disturbed and frustrated by the unfocused and disorganized way colleges and universities confront present exigencies and their failure to plan for the longrun. There are a few instances of long-range planning in educational programming, setting goals, redefining missions, or establishing parameters for institutional development."

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Initially, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning at Atlanta University was viewed as a repository for statistical, or other data, or more simply, a data bank.

When the President was asked to explain in his own words, what he saw as the function of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning at the time of its inception, he said, that "he saw it as being used to answer particular management questions by serving as an aggregator for many bits and pieces about the University." More specifically, though, "he perceived this Office as providing a clear picture to key administrators of the whole structure of the University in terms of students, faculty, resources and facilities."

The profession of Institutional Research and Planning was familiar to the President of Atlanta University before its inception on the campus. He made a point of saying that "few schools, especially black schools had very little concept of what Institutional Research and Planning was and how it could be useful." He also pointed out that when "Atlanta University began to talk of creating such an office, there were no known existing models to study or emulate in black institutions."

In January, 1975, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning was officially established at Atlanta University. Limited funds were available through the Ford Foundation. However, it is significant to mention, that the University took the initiative to create the office and would have done
so without the financial assistance from the Ford Foundation.

Thus, the inception of The Office of Institutional Research and Planning was perceived as being a catalyst that would enable administrators to plan wisely and further the mission of Atlanta University by adequately preparing minority students for roles of leadership.
The term "decision-making" in higher education tends to focus attention on the process of administration, rather than on its structure.

What is a decision? The most suitable definition given by Webster is: "An act of determining in one's own mind upon an opinion or a course of action." A decision is a mental act, or a rational act. The primary unit in a decision is an individual person. This is an extremely important part of the concept implied in the term "decision-making." It is important in most cases to know who made a decision, and that the decision-maker had authority to make the decision. The precise location of the source of a decision is essential in good administration.

It may be useful to classify decisions for further analysis of the decision-making process. There are at least four different systems of classifying decisions that have to be made in higher education. The most customary method places them in two groups: those that are large, or important, or those that are small and relatively unimportant.

In a well administered institution, one would expect to find important decisions are made finally at a high level in the organizational structure, and that the small decisions are made at the lower echelons of executive responsibility.
For example, the decision to add a new school or college to the university organization is made at the level of the president, the board of trustees, and accrediting agencies. However, action on the request of a janitor to take a day off from work would ordinarily be taken by a foreman or supervisor several echelons below the president's office.

One difficulty in classifying decisions into small and large arises from the inability to foresee their long-term effects. What may seem a particularly difficult and large decision at the moment may in the long run, have no important consequences for the institution. By contrast, a decision that for the moment may seem inconsequential may ultimately prove to have important effects on the whole future of the institution's program.

Two examples can be cited to support this argument. First, the Switchboard Communications System at Atlanta University was considered to be a relatively insignificant problem. On many occasions, personnel and individuals calling the University from outside have complained that they have difficulty in trying to get through to various administrative and academic offices. Consequently, these complaints have made the one time seemingly small problem into a rather complex one. As a result, administrators are seriously contemplating ways to overcome these obstacles in order to make the Switchboard Communications System much more efficient.
On the other hand, a lack of space within the University was reviewed as being a large or difficult problem. However, various studies that were conducted by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning proved otherwise. The problem was not a shortage or lack of space within the University; the problem centered around the proper utilization of all available space. Hence, this problem could be resolved without tremendous difficulty.

A second method of classifying decisions is to separate them into those that involve the academic program and those that are non-academic. The distinction is based on the idea that, if decisions can be so classified, then the authority to make decisions can be assigned to the respective elements of the organizational structure.

It is very difficult to identify any large number of situations where the decision does not involve the academic program in some manner; also situations may seem purely academic, but may involve non-academic areas.

A third system of classifying decisions involves the separation into those entailing policy and those that entail action. For example, the faculty may make a policy decision about the qualifications of students that are to be admitted, and this policy probably goes to the Board of Trustees for official adoption. But the decision to admit a particular applicant is usually delegated to the admissions officer or registrar.
A fourth method of classification divides decisions into the areas of programmed and unprogrammed. An unprogrammed decision requires fresh thought and study, one for which adequate rules or precedents are not easily available. The programmed decision is made by reference to established policies or precedents, requiring no re-thinking about the extended implications.

While each of the four classifications are dichotomous, under none of the systems is the division a sharp one. There must be considerable tolerance about any generalizations concerning the assignment of decision-making to personnel at various levels in the organizational structure of a college or university.

A study of many decisions indicates that there is a basic structure which underlies all specific decisions:

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Identify the Problem

Specify Conditions for Solution

Determine Tentative Solution

Make Decision
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Institutional Research and Planning is becoming the mechanism for providing information to decision-makers in higher education. Academic administrators are qualified as generalist and, for the most part, they know very little about newly developed tools of Institutional Research and Planning. On the other hand, though, this is not to say that administrators are not knowledgeable.

"Academic administrators have a very broad knowledge of institutions and almost all facets of the institution--a knowledge far broader than students or faculty or other administrators whose work maybe confined to a given area such as that of the financial officer or registrar. The Institutional Research and Planning Director only attempts to help them exercise their responsibility for academic decisions." 4

By the very nature of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning being engaged in the comprehensive self study of the University and assisting the President in developing and maximizing educational services, the director is given the status of being a member of the administrative team and is therefore directly accountable to the President.

The Institutional Research and Planning activities on the operational level at the small black college such as Atlanta University are not very different than those on the predominately white campus. However, factors common to black students are woven into the research design and interpretations of institutional studies. Consequently, the Director of Institutional Research and Planning at Atlanta University addresses problems that are unique to Atlanta University. If

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this was not the case, much of the research would be meaningless and unbeneficial.

The following passage best describes the Office of Institutional Research and Planning at Atlanta University:

"The Office of Institutional Research and Planning aims to establish the capability to conduct studies which interpret the current status of the university, assist in the decision-making process for intermediate and long-range planning and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the institution relative to the current state-of-the-art in higher education." 5

The Director of Institutional Research and Planning assists the President of Atlanta University in several ways. Some of the ways which enable the Office of Institutional Research and Planning to impact upon presidential decision-making include:

1. Developing procedures for systematically collecting, analyzing, and retrieving data related to the operation of all phases of the University's program.

2. Improving administrative procedures through conducting workshops on the systems approach to educational management.

3. Assisting in the development and implementation of a management information system that will aid the President of the University in making institutional decisions and improving planning processes.

5 Institute for Services to Education. Consortia for Institutional Research (Washington: Institute for Services to Education, 1975), p. 1
To date, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning has played a vital role in the total information and reporting system of Atlanta University. It has measured the degree of influence that the institution's various programs have had on students. It has also been responsible for conducting workshops and studies which have helped to generate institutional data for input into presidential decisions. These projects and studies have not only been beneficial to the President, but they have also provided information about the University to the institutional family, and external organizations such as accrediting agencies. The United States Office of Education and offices within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning has also collected and codified data relative to the current status of the University, and has supplied the President with appropriate data that has "already assisted him in the planning and decision-making functions of the University."

The first studies that were conducted by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning were requested by the President. These studies included the following: 1) Students: number, sex, level of study, social, economic, and educational origins. 2) Faculty: number, degree, experience, academic rank, average salary, and teaching load. 3) Instruction: number of sections, section site, credit hours produced, and grade distribution.
Granted, these studies may appear general, but, heretofore, this data was not readily available and maintained in a current or up-to-date status. These studies afforded the President an opportunity to get a clearer perspective of the University in addition to requesting further studies which would help him to plan more accurately for the academic and co-curricular programs that could more adequately meet the needs of the students.

An in-depth interview with the President of Atlanta University (See Appendix) gave a more vivid picture of how the Office of Institutional Research and Planning has impacted on his decision-making.

During the interview, Dr. Jarrett said that "he did not initially view the Office of Institutional Research and Planning as being a service mechanism. However, he said that he currently views it as being related to the total operation of the University because it touches every function of the organization."

During the past academic year, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning proved to be an effective management tool for decision-making. For example, this Office ran budget simulation models and budget analyses from 1973 to 1978. The purpose of this exercise was to develop strategies for the replacement of Ford Foundation grant funds when its commitment ends. The exercise has
proven to be helpful because the model provided the President, in addition to planners an overall picture of what Atlanta University would look like at a future date. It helped them to predict what may be expected in revenue received from gifts in 1978. In his own words, the President said that "this exercise also highlighted serious implications of what the budget would be like in these future years." This study has given him a head start with respect to establishing new efforts to replace the Ford funds.

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning also conducted studies that were warnings or indicators to the President of Atlanta University that serious changes should be considered regarding academic programs, adjustments in faculty and staff, and new approaches to student recruitment. From these studies, the President began to face up to the realization that somehow there must be a retrenchment and a careful study of programs that were no longer productive. All academic programs were reviewed to determine their viability and the President was contemplating the possibility of adding new programs and deleting old ones that were no longer in demand or marketable.

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning also extended the Budget Simulation studies and did further analyses of programs that cost more, yet produced fewer students. Projections were also made of the feasibility of
of new programs with respect to their value both presently and futuristically.

A projection was also made of how attractive new programs would be to students and what type of faculty would be needed to implement new courses of study. It is significant to point out that the Office of Institutional Research and Planning tried to identify sources for starting, and later maintaining these new programs.

The President also cited other decisions that were influenced by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning during the past academic year. These decisions included: First, how to best hold the line in terms of faculty expansion in view of the economic crunch; and second, the decision to increase tuition even in view of the fact that many students were unable to pay. This, however, was due to a pay and cost of living factor which compelled an increase in the operating funds at Atlanta University.

Recently, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning produced Atlanta University's first FACT BOOK. The President looks upon this FACT BOOK as being of considerable value and will inevitably help to foresee in which direction Atlanta University will grow. This FACT BOOK gives an assessment of materials that will play a crucial role with respect to decision-making.
The Office of Institutional Research and Planning is perceived by the President of Atlanta University as being a key administrative office. The President noted that, "this office has won respect and has markedly gained acceptance among other administrators". This "office has also, in his opinion, helped the data flow process to become more orderly, accurate, and systematic". In addition, the President also remarked that, "The Office of Institutional Research and Planning has made information readily available which has made it easier for the University to comply with state and federal reports.

Finally, in his own words, the President commented that "the Office of Institutional Research and Planning has rendered an invaluable service and has done a tremendous job so far, but he would like to see it grow and expand more."
CHAPTER IV

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AND PLANNING AT ATLANTA UNIVERSITY: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING THIS OFFICE AND CONCLUSION

There is no question that Institutional Research and Planning has had a significant impact on presidential decision-making at Atlanta University. The director has built up a relationship of mutual trust and confidence with the President by indicating to him how Institutional Research and Planning could provide hitherto untapped sources of information for decision-making.

During an in-depth interview (See Appendix) President Jarrett was asked if the Office of Institutional Research and Planning was considered a permanent function of the University. He thought that this was a difficult question to answer, but based on his present experience with this office, he foresees it as playing an even larger role in the decision-making process and the overall management system of the University.

In order for Institutional Research and Planning to expand and become a more vital force in the decision-making process, it must have the support and endorsement of the President and other key administrators.
"Institutional Research and Planning will not develop adequately as a profession nor will the Office of Institutional Research and Planning Director be able to make their maximum contribution to the future of American higher education unless and until those chiefly responsible for academic decisions are convinced of the importance of Institutional Research and they will not be convinced until they have been educated to its potential and possibilities."  

As a small black university, the development and expansion of the impact and function of Institutional Research and Planning can be great. There is no reason, that once this office matures, it cannot publish some of its studies and be recognized as a model for other colleges to emulate.

"Institutional Research and Planning at traditionally black institutions in particular must begin to publicize their efforts. Their unique needs have been the impetus for development of many very original approaches to providing information and data to support their administrative and functional decision-makers."

From the actual day-to-day experiences, the in-depth interview with the President of Atlanta University, and numerous articles extracted from various sources, one discovered that Institutional Research and Planning has strong implications for the future in higher education. One feels that it will play an even more significant role in the overall decision-making process at Atlanta University.


The Director of Institutional Research and Planning will work closely with the President to help him fully understand the contributions Institutional Research and Planning can make in the future planning of the University which, in essence, will help it to grow and survive as an institution of higher learning.

Even though the contributions of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning have been profound with respect to Presidential decision-making, its impact could be even greater.

There are two recommendations that are made in this paper to possibly help strengthen the Institutional Research Office.

First, this office is still young, but the Director and her staff of one person have done a very professional job. It is recommended that the staff be increased from two to four persons. The Director needs another assistant in addition to a secretary or clerical assistant. This would enable the office to undertake more studies to substantiate more decisions.

The second recommendation is that the Office of Institutional Research and Planning develop a better rapport with the various Deans and Department Chairpersons. This would enable the Deans and Chairpersons to have an up-to-date picture of trends in their schools and what the projected demands for various professions in the future will be.
If the Deans and Department Chairpersons would recognize the potential of Institutional Research and confidence is won in terms of respect for it as a profession, more than likely, a deluge of requests for all kinds of information will follow.

Institutional Research and Planning is a dynamic force with regard to presidential decision-making at Atlanta University. Currently, Institutional Research and Planning is in a somewhat self critical mood on many campuses. This is a clear sign that the profession is now mature, well established and secure. Hence, within a few years, all major institutional decisions will be made from information supplied by this office.
APPENDIX
QUESTIONNAIRE*

SECTION I:

Administrative Decision-Making

1. As a key administrator in higher education, do you view the new trend of using management information systems as being vital or essential when making decisions? Please comment.

2. Was the profession of Institutional Research and Planning and its duties familiar to you before the creation of such an office at Atlanta University?

3. How were major decisions made at Atlanta University prior to the creation of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning?

4. During the past academic year, what four crucial decisions did you make regarding the University?
   a) What criteria did you use to make these decisions?
   b) How did you arrive at the criteria that was used?

5. Is Atlanta University at a point where its administrators must consider changes in its academic programs, adjustments in faculty and staff and new approaches to recruitment?
   a) What mechanisms or systems will you use to arrive at these decisions?
   b) Will the Office of Institutional Research and Planning play a role in helping to bring about these changes?

*NOTE: This questionnaire was used to interview Dr. Thomas D. Jarrett, President of Atlanta University
SECTION II:

The Need to Establish an Office of Institutional Research and Planning at Atlanta University

1. What factors led to the creation of an Office of Institutional Research and Planning at Atlanta University?

2. In your own words, what did you see as the function of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning at that time?
   a) What do you see as its role now?
   b) Do you feel that your conceptions of the Office have:
      
      1) Changed      Yes     No
      2) Remained Constant     Yes     No
      3) Still not sure what that Office is supposed to do Yes     No

3. How much communication was there with other institutions in the Atlanta University Center regarding the importance and the need to establish this Office?

4. Were funds available to assist in initiating an Office of Institutional Research and Planning at Atlanta University?
   a) If the answer is yes: From what source?
   b) If funds were not available from an outside source, would the University have gone ahead with its creation?
SECTION III:

The Effectiveness of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning

1. In your opinion, is the Office of Institutional Research and Planning meeting the needs of the University with respect to data collection, dissemination of materials, and conducting relevant surveys?

2. In the 1976 President's Report, it was stated that the Office of Institutional Research and Planning ran or is currently running budget simulation models and budget analyses from 1973 to 1978; and that this office was developing strategies for the replacement of Ford Foundation grant funds when its commitment ends. How has this particular research helped you to make decisions?

3. Since the inception of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning, has there been any noticeable change in the data flow process?

4. Has the data flow process made it easier for the University to respond and comply with federal, state, and local reports?

5. Has the overall information system supplied by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning been effective in serving as a management tool for an improved decision-making process?
SECTION IV:

The Role of Institutional Research and Planning in the Future Planning of Atlanta University

1. Do you consider the Office of Institutional Research and Planning to be a key administrative office?

2. Do you think this office has won respect and gained acceptance among other administrators?

3. Do you view this Office as a permanent function of the University?

4. What do you think should be the thrust of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning in future planning for Atlanta University?

5. What role will this Office play in helping to bring about changes you envision taking place at Atlanta University with regard to:

1) Academic Programs

2) Student Enrollment

3) Long-Range Planning

4) Facility Development
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