



## **Now that's a great question!**

by Chris Meinzer

March 2017

As most of you know, ATS collects lots of data each fall. The data collected encompass admissions, completions, development, enrollment, finance, personnel, salaries, and so much more. The current institutional database holds data for our member schools going back into the late 1980s. Recently, a representative from a governmental agency proclaimed that the ATS institutional database was the most comprehensive and useful database the representative had ever seen.<sup>1</sup> The ATS staff appreciate comments like this, but we find it even more satisfying to know that the data help our membership make informed decisions about strategic direction.

There are many standard reports by ATS that are intended to support the member schools, such as the ATS Annual Data Tables, ATS Institutional Peer Profile Report (IPPR), and ATS Strategic Information Report (SIR). (Please see a more thorough description at <http://www.ats.edu/resources/institutional-data>.) These standard reports were generated and made available to the membership in early March.

Even more exciting, at least for me, is when the data collection and reporting process prompts additional questions from administrators within a school. I appreciate when a president, academic dean, CFO, or board member will send me an email requesting further clarification or deeper understanding of the data they are reviewing. Many times, their thinking takes us deeper into the database to see if we can discern underlying trends or nuanced facets of what we are seeing on the surface. I get excited about this aspect of our collective work, and my favorite response is, "Now that's a great question!"

---

<sup>1</sup> Many of the ATS staff are involved in the data collection, analysis, and reporting, but two deserve to be mentioned here. Chris Olsztyn, director of information technology, is responsible for maintaining all of the infrastructure that support that ATS institutional database. Alissa Horton, coordinator of business and data, provides oversight to the annual data collection and vetting process.

Recently, someone asked about the tenure of presidents and deans in ATS schools. There is much anecdotal evidence, but they wondered what story the data had to tell. Here is what we found in this one example of data-diving:

#### Chief executive officer tenure

The current database only has full personnel data going back 10 years to 2007. In the decade between 2007 and 2016, there were 636 persons who were identified as CEO in the database. I then removed persons who only show up for one or two years. (This trims those who only show up in 2007 or only show up in 2016. It also eliminates intentional interims.) This trimming reduced the number to 400 persons. Of these 400 persons:

- About 15% have been presidents all 10 of these years. Please note that it is possible that they have served longer than that, but they have definitely been presidents for at least 10 years.
- About 10% have been president for 8–9 of these years.
- About 20% have been president for 6–7 of these years.
- The average estimated length for these 400 persons is about 5.5 years. This is slightly longer than the person raising the question had anticipated. What would you have guessed?

#### Chief academic officer tenure

In the same manner, I pursued the average tenure of CAOs. Between 2007 and 2016, there were 738 persons who were identified as CAO in the database. I then removed persons who only show up for one or two years. (This trims those who only show up in 2007 or only show up in 2016. It also eliminates intentional interims or reporting anomalies.) This trimming brought the number down to just under 400 persons. Of these nearly 400 persons:

- About 7% have been academic deans all 10 of these years. Please note that it is possible that they have served longer than that, but they have definitely been deans for at least 10 years.
- About 10% have been dean for 8–9 of these years.
- About 20% have been dean for 6–7 of these years.
- The average estimated length for these nearly 400 persons is about 5.1 years. This is a fair bit longer than was anticipated.
- The mode, the count of years that shows up the most frequently, was 3 years.

By interrogating the ATS database, we are able to go beyond anecdotal understanding and simple reasoning to ask questions that can really further institutional decision-making and choices. There are many more examples of great questions that come from our member schools.

I am normally data-diving once or twice a week to seek some clarification for a school on a particular issue. And it makes all of the data collection, analysis, and reporting worthwhile when we can help an institution broaden its knowledge base. Even more, these moments of data interrogation for one school frequently find their

way into a blog or article or leadership education presentation. One great question from a school can lead to greater comprehension for the entire ATS membership.

One great question from a school can lead to greater comprehension for the entire ATS membership.

So don't be shy. If you are wondering about a question that has been generated by your review of your school's IPPR or SIR, please send me an email to [meinzer@ats.edu](mailto:meinzer@ats.edu) so that we can do a little data exploration. Who knows, maybe the question—and the answer—will inspire a future blog or article. Now that's a great question!