

APPENDIX A

Historical Context

Finding useful and relevant comparative data for information technology units in higher education has long been a challenge, and a number of data-collection activities have arisen through the years to meet this need. Prior to its consolidation with Educom in the summer of 1998,¹ CAUSE had been capturing data from its members for nearly 20 years. Early surveys collected data primarily on administrative systems, as the CAUSE mission had not yet broadened to encompass academic computing. Academic computing data were captured in a survey done annually by Charles Warlick of the University of Texas at Austin. Between these two surveys, the IT community had access to some fundamental data about academic and administrative hardware and software. Warlick's data were published regularly in a print compendium, while summary CAUSE data were published periodically in monograph form.

In addition, the CAUSE data were used to form the basis of an Institution Database (ID) service through which members could request custom reports drawn from the data in six major areas: staffing, budgets, organization, software, computer hardware, and communications. This service was quite popular with members, peaking at 442 custom reports requested in FY1994–1995 and declining in 1996 after CAUSE stopped collecting these data annually.

The CAUSE ID survey instrument changed

over the years as the association's mission changed, and especially after Warlick ceased to do his survey about a decade ago. Several years earlier, Kenneth C. Green had already begun to disseminate and report the findings of a comprehensive academic computing survey (called the Campus Computing Project) that focused on the microcomputer environment on campuses throughout the country, a survey that continues today (see <<http://www.campuscomputing.net>>).

Another data collection activity, called the COSTS Project, was developed in the late 1990s by David Smallen and Karen Leach (now chief information officer and chief financial officer, respectively, at Hamilton College) to identify and capture information about the cost of networking on campus (see <<http://www.costsproject.org>>). This activity for the most part attracted the participation of small, liberal arts institutions.

Following the merger of CAUSE and Educom, EDUCAUSE developed a number of strategies for delivering a research program to capture and share the data and information our members need to plan for and manage IT on their campuses. First, an EDUCAUSE Current Issues Survey was launched in 2000 and has been conducted annually since then (see <<http://www.educause.edu/issues>>). Then, in 2001, the EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research (ECAR) was created (see <<http://www.educause.edu/ecar>>). Finally, an EDUCAUSE task force was convened in the fall of 2001 to

consider establishing an ongoing core data collection activity similar to the earlier CAUSE ID survey and service. The dozen members of this task force were representative of the demographic diversity of the EDUCAUSE membership, from small and large, public and private institutions as well as from schools with varying Carnegie classifications. The group recommended that the association develop a Core Data Service (CDS) that would disseminate a Web-based survey instrument to collect data about information technology environments and practices on member campuses.

The goal of the CDS would be to provide

- a new, Web-based, interactive database service available to all who complete the survey through which they can access data contributed by their peers to help benchmark, plan, and make decisions about IT on their campus; and
- an annual summary report about campus IT environments based on data contributed through the survey.

This new service was launched in December 2002 with the idea that it would not duplicate but rather cooperate with exist-

ing IT-related data collection efforts and explore opportunities to partner with other associations in such efforts. To that end, in the summer of 2005, leaders of EDUCAUSE and the COSTS Project agreed to integrate their respective efforts to gather and analyze data about the costs and environmental factors of information technology in higher education. Thus the 2005 EDUCAUSE core data survey, launched in January of 2006, included questions that would enable former COSTS Project participants to henceforth use the CDS service to access the data they need for IT planning.

Note

1. CAUSE, the Association for the Management of Information Technology in Higher Education, was founded in 1971 as a nonprofit professional association, with an initial focus on administrative computing. Educom was a nonprofit consortium of higher education institutions whose mission was to facilitate the introduction, use, access to, and management of information resources in teaching, learning, scholarship, and research. The two organizations merged in 1998 to form EDUCAUSE, whose mission is to advance higher education by promoting the intelligent use of information technology.