

## CASE STUDY

# Campaign to ‘Free the Data’ Transforms IR’s Work—and Supports Enrollment Growth

**University of Montana**, a Large Public Research University in Missoula, Montana

- **About:** University of Montana (UM) is the flagship institution of the Montana University System and enrolls 11,000 students.
- **Challenge:** The University of Montana has suffered from enrollment declines over the past decade. Poor governance hampered attempts to remedy the decline. Data was stored in separate systems that only experts could access, reports were hard to compile, and different teams often produced different answers to the same question. Data-informed recommendations were sometimes ignored because leaders received conflicting figures.
- **Solution:** UM partnered with EAB’s Education Data Hub (EDH) to improve data governance and increase access. EDH aggregates and organizes all campus data into one environment with a single point of access. With newly centralized data, UM’s team of developers can easily export data to over 50 dashboards they’ve built in Tableau, making validated data available for analysis and decision support across campus.
- **Impact:** UM’s Institutional Research (IR) team regained hours previously spent manually updating dashboards. The IR team is using this new time for higher-order analyses, for example, developing KPIs for the five initiatives in the UM strategic plan and analyzing historical student accounts data to create an interactive dashboard that will help maximize the impact of tuition waivers on enrollment.

## Impact Highlight

“Without the infrastructure of EDH, strategic analyses are too labor-intensive. You’re saving us having to hire a lot more staff.”

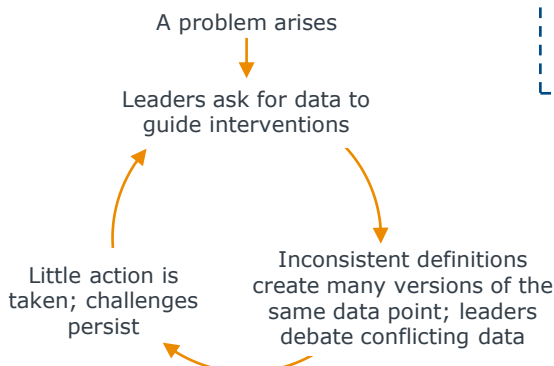
-Dawn Ressel,  
Chief Data Officer and Associate Vice  
President for Institutional Research

## Breaking the Cycle of Indecision

### UM’s “Free the Data” Campaign Moves Data Users from Debate to Action

Since 2016, UM’s Chief Data Officer, Dawn Ressel, has led a campaign to “free the data,” to move UM’s campus data from a matrix of siloed and hard-to-access systems to an environment in which users across the university can easily access reliable information. In 2020, UM partnered with EDH to further this work. With EDH, UM will have a centralized hub of certified data that can be exported to Tableau dashboards for reference and analysis. Before these improvements, disagreements about data accuracy frequently stalled progress on strategic initiatives.

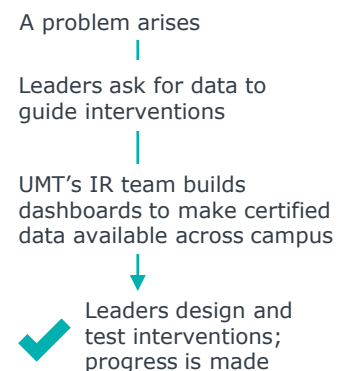
#### The problem: Inconsistent data creates early stumbling blocks



+ Better university-wide data governance  
+ Wider access to data

*“Free the Data” Campaign and EDH Partnership*

#### The goal: Leaders across campus make data-informed decisions



## Enabling Strategic Analytics

### EDH Partnership Will Help Move IR from Data Gathering to Analysis

Before partnering with EDH, UM's IR team spent most of their time completing ad hoc analyses and manually updating dashboards. As data starts flowing through EDH, they will regain significant time:

- UM's Chief Data Officer estimates **EDH will save her team one month's work every year** given the 5 to 10 hours they spend regularly updating each of 30 dashboards.
- Recently, **an EAB data expert was able to understand and decode UM's student accounts data in a one-hour call, something the UM IR team had struggled with for years** due to limitations in the SIS.

With more time available, the IR team and data experts across campus will be able to refocus their energy on strategic analytics. This includes developing KPIs to measure progress on the five priorities of the UM strategic plan.

### Data to Operationalize Strategic Goals

**Strategic priority:** "Place student success at the center of all we do"

**Goal:** Improve retention and graduation

**Action:** Allocate resources where need is greatest

**Accountability:** Track progress

**With better data governance and access, IR can more easily:**

- Provide easy-to-use dashboards that illustrate data beyond institution-level trends (e.g., retention rates in individual colleges and departments)
- Use historical data to develop leading indicators for potential retention risks
- Develop KPIs to track the institution's progress on its goal of improving retention and graduation

Source: "Strategic Initiatives," UM Office of the President.



"We've been bean counters for years. **I don't need to know how many; I need to know why.**"

*Dawn Ressel,  
Chief Data Officer and  
Associate Vice President for  
Institutional Research*

## Maximizing Tuition Assistance to Increase Enrollment

### Dashboard Will Track Waivers to Monitor Net Tuition Amounts and Student Enrollments

Over the last eight years, enrollment at UM continued to decline despite their low tuition price compared to other state flagship institutions. In response, UM offered tuition waivers to encourage enrollment. Recognizing that the University can't increase the amount of tuition waivers indefinitely, the IR team is using EDH to build a dashboard that will track and analyze years of tuition waiver data to determine which enrollment strategies work. The specific goals of the dashboard are to:

- Find the band of tuition waiver amounts that lead to enrollment so UM can then make the most of their resources.
- Develop leading indicators to create earlier visibility into whether UM has more money to offer (currently, this data is not available until the fall).

### Dashboard Plans in Detail



#### Metrics

- Waiver amounts granted
- Enrollment
- Net tuition revenue



#### Users

- Operations and Finance
- Enrollment Management
- President's Cabinet



Users will be able to **toggle between historical and live data**

