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Academic Library Assessment: Strengthening the Collective

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Academic Library Assessment: Strengthening the Collective

Library Assessment Conference 2020

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Introduction

The Florida Academic Library Services Cooperative (FALSC) leads and coordinates projects and resources for academic libraries at 40 state universities and colleges. The cooperative structure brings together stakeholders at multiple levels. The Members Council on Library Services (MCLS; FALSC and library leadership) oversees seven standing committees, each charged with specific work that serves the cooperative. Each committee includes librarians from college and university libraries, and liaisons from FALSC and the MCLS. The Library Assessment Standing Committee (LASC) charge is to:

- Assist and advise the MCLS regarding methods and tools for library assessment;
- Create a centralized repository to house examples of best practices for assessment methods and activities;
- Identify and promote examples of effective library assessment methods;
- Create a shared repository of examples of library assessment practices for SACS and other accreditation;
- Provide recommendations to the MCLS for resources and activities to support assessment in all libraries in the collective;
- Provide regular reports to the MCLS.

By bringing librarians from different institutions together around this shared charge, the committee identifies common needs and goals, leverages expertise to address these, and facilitates communication among all the libraries. Evaluation of data visualization tools was a great opportunity to strengthen the collective by pursuing a common goal with many mutually beneficial results.

Methodology

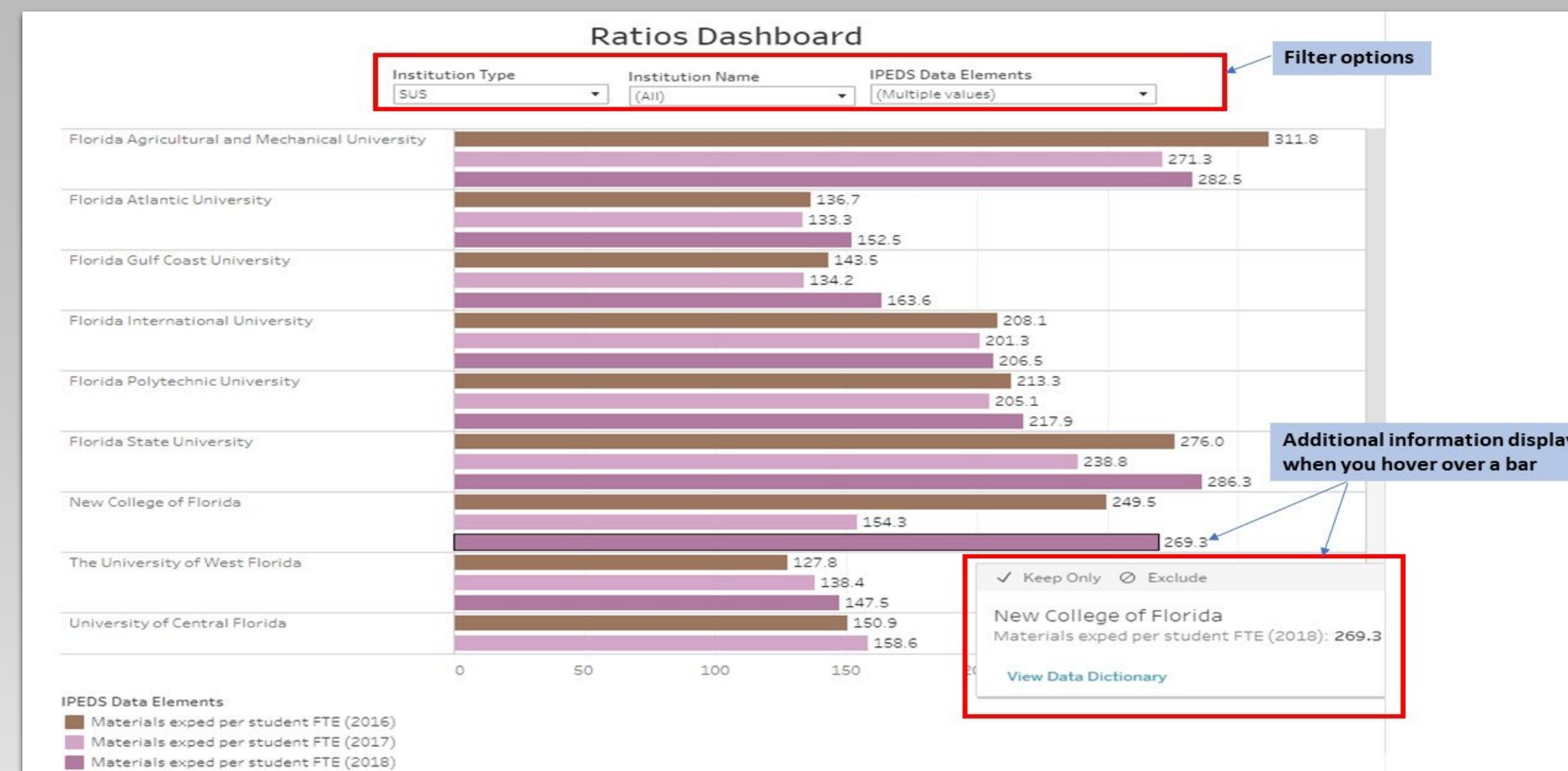
Over the past year, the LASC worked together to create and share two interactive dashboards that visually summarized IPEDS data for forty public college and university libraries in Florida. As a committee, we:

- Identified comparable examples of visualizations from other institutions (Messner, 2020; Moore & Croxton, 2019);
- Agreed on a common dataset (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System; IPEDS);
- Selected two platforms to evaluate, Tableau and Power BI;
- Evaluated and documented each platform with regard to cost, shareability, accessibility, licensing, feasibility, sustainability;
- Piloted the visualization dashboards on the LASC Guide: <https://falsc.libguides.com/LASC> ;
- Compared each platform from the standpoint of usability and clarity;

Florida Academic Library Data Dashboard: Tableau & Power BI Comparison

All reports can be viewed on the [LASC Guide](#)

Tableau: Report of Expenditures per Student FTE with option to select other ratio data elements using the IPEDS Data Elements filter.



Power BI: Report of Expenditures per Student FTE.

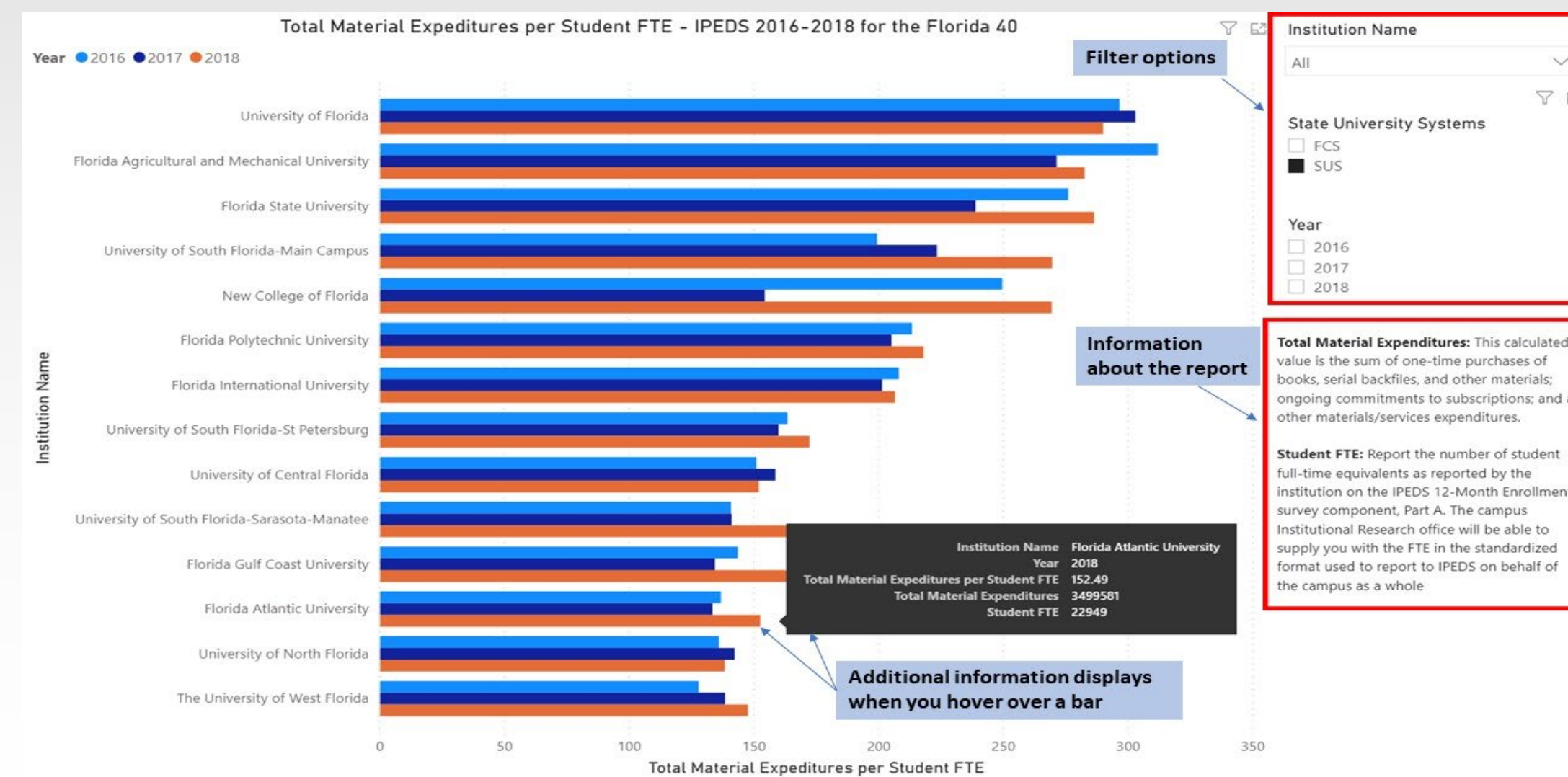


Tableau and Power BI Usability Comparison: <https://tinyurl.com/dataviz-comparison>

Findings & Next Steps

Members of the Committee were able to compare data visualization platforms and make use of de-siloed IPEDS data for all 40 institutions. The versatility of the tools used allowed members to compare and contrast peer institutional data, and analyze datasets such as collections, expenditures, services, and ratios. We could sort by categories (e.g., colleges versus universities) and crowdsource new meaningful or needed measures.

Other Findings:

- Members compared platforms Tableau and Power BI and recorded Pros and Cons of Usability;
- Decided that Tableau was visually appealing with multi-filter options;
- Determine what platforms institutions already have;

Next Steps:

- Communicate findings to new statewide assessment listserv
- Advocate for a statewide resource;
- Train others to equip them to use new platform;
- Determined further evaluation needed to learn more about assessment that is taking place across the state via a statewide survey and/or by sharing our assessment stories;

Practical Implications & Value

The involvement of librarians and academic libraries in a statewide consortium who are conducting assessment strengthens the collective. It is mutually beneficial to the library statewide consortium and to the assessment activities going on in individual institutions.

This project strengthened the collective in many following ways:

- Focused committee collaboration;
- Created Florida 40 IPEDS Dashboard;
- Enhanced usability of IPEDS data by bringing it together in dashboard;
- Increased professional development opportunities and leveraged expertise, inspiring future projects (e.g., offering training in Tableau);
- Positioned our statewide group to contribute to a national project, the [Library Assessment Repository](#)
- Enhanced communication among the state college and university libraries (e.g., created a statewide assessment listserv);
- Laid groundwork for coordinated advocacy. One of the most important outcomes of our work together is that as a group, we are moving our conversations from data analytics to meaningful outcomes assessment.

Other assessment committees and librarians can use the methods and tools described here and adapt them to meet their local needs. Visit our [handout](#) for more information.

Acknowledgments: This work would not be possible without the support of the FALSC staff, especially Brian Erb, and the members of the LASC, past and present.