

TODD MILDON, UNIVERSITY REGISTRAR AND INFORMATION OFFICER FOR STUDENT LIFE,  
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

## Data allows university to tell its success story

Becoming university registrar at the University of Washington enabled Todd Milton to combine his expertise in technology and law. “I see the university



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registrar job as the perfect combination,” said Milton, whose diverse experience includes working as a business technology consultant and earning a law degree from Cornell University.

His added role as information officer for student life lets him use the data available to tell his institution’s story in the way people expect stories to be told in the 21st century, he said.

“Everyone knows that American education is a great story of success,” Milton said. Data explains why and how the success occurs.

To collect the data and make it available, officials at UW created an enterprise-grade data warehouse, Milton said. This warehouse brings together data from many source systems including those housing academic records and financial, human resources and facilities information. It allows a detailed, cross-silo view of what the institution is doing, he added.

Rigorous data definitions make the information useful. Without those, Milton might say to a dean, “You have this many students.” The dean could respond, “No, I have more.” Good definitions mean that the data stands for something specific, he said.

The project was successful because it had support from the institution’s top leadership. Milton and his staff members shared a vision with the president, provost and technology leaders. That vision drove the project, he said.

The administration created an Office of Information Management to help focus the conversation institutionwide, he said. Milton serves on the Data Management Committee, which brings together people who understand the data to decide what will go into the warehouse next.

The warehouse is Web-based, and it stores data across time. Information about topics such as registration, course offerings, and admissions and graduation profiles is stored so that it’s possible to compare contents from one date or year to the next.

Data is automatically updated and uploaded. Users can create reports from their Web browser and

do not need to download the data first.

Users log in with their university net ID. Access is determined by the user’s ID. The goal is to give people access to the information they need to do their work but to also keep the institution in compliance with privacy laws. A high-level user might have access to sensitive information such as Social Security numbers and race and disability status, but a lower-level user could not see this data, Milton said.

The warehouse has opened access to the data to deans and staff members at all colleges. Before it was created, some colleges had databases that allowed them to create reports but others didn’t, Milton said.

This access has become increasingly important as the institution moved to activity-based budgeting, he said. Colleges can use the data to advocate for budget dollars under this system of putting money where work is being done.

To make sure that users know what the data warehouse can do and how to use it, Milton set up a classroom. He is hiring a full-time learning manager to teach people how to access data and create reports.

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### Records research helps right a wrong

In 1942, hundreds of University of Washington students with Japanese ancestry were forced into internment camps. Many never completed their degrees.

Todd Milton, university registrar and information officer for student life, supported the effort to grant those former students honorary degrees.

Milton and his staff members helped identify the students by reviewing transcripts from the early 1940s. They spent hundreds of hours in a basement finding records of students with Japanese surnames, he said.

The Long Journey Home Planning Committee also got lists of possible names from Japanese-American community groups and the student association for Japanese Americans.

Once the effort gained publicity, former students came forward and asked to be included.

After more than a year of research and preparation, the students received degrees in May 2008. About 200 of them or their designees attended the ceremony, Milton said. ■