



# The Role of IR in Facilitating Efficiencies on Campus

Teri Lyn Thill

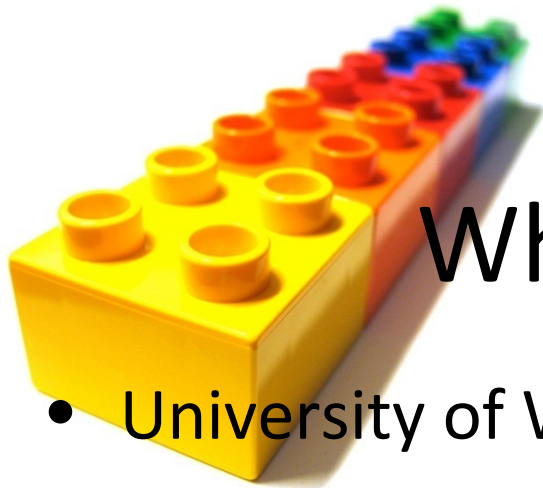
Director of Institutional Research  
University of Wisconsin – La Crosse

“As a nerd, my bias is towards paper-and-ink books, and while I do indeed use information technology, asking a coherent question about how any of it works is evidently beyond me. A geek, by contrast, knows source code....has strong opinions about source code....can talk to other geeks about source code, and at some length. (One imagines them doing so via high-pitched clicking noises.)”

Scott McLemee, *It's all Geek to Me*, Inside Higher Ed  
July 16, 2008

(<http://insidehighered.com/views/2008/07/16/mclemee>)



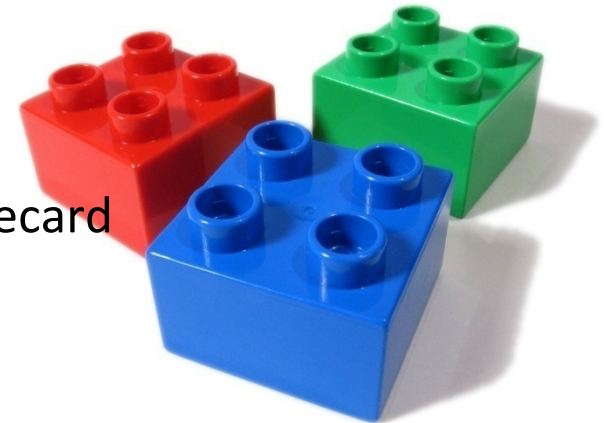


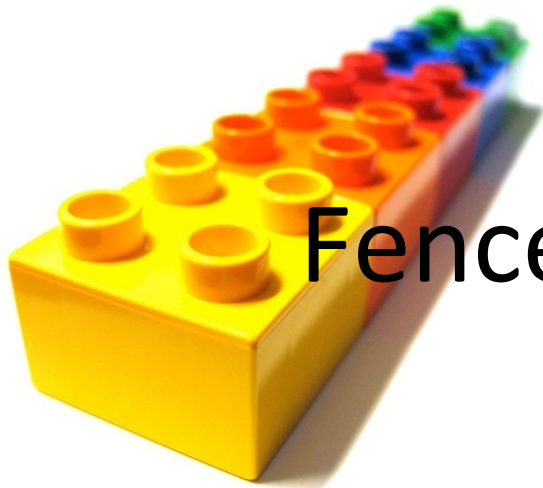
# Who are you again?

- University of Wisconsin – La Crosse
  - Public comprehensive, one of 13 four-year institutions in the University of Wisconsin System
  - Approximately 10,000 headcount enrollment, including about 800 off-campus students in Teacher Professional Development Graduate programs
  - Declining state support, increasing enrollment expectations
  - Highest student to faculty ratio of ranked Public Midwestern Masters Universities in US News rankings

# Right, but who are \*you\*?

- Director of Institutional Research since November 2004
  - “Director” in title only – single-person office (until February!)
  - Served on the Student and Family Information Task Force for AASCU & NASULGC’s Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA)
  - Consultant
    - Continuing role on VSA Support Team
    - Center for Urban Education on Equity Scorecard





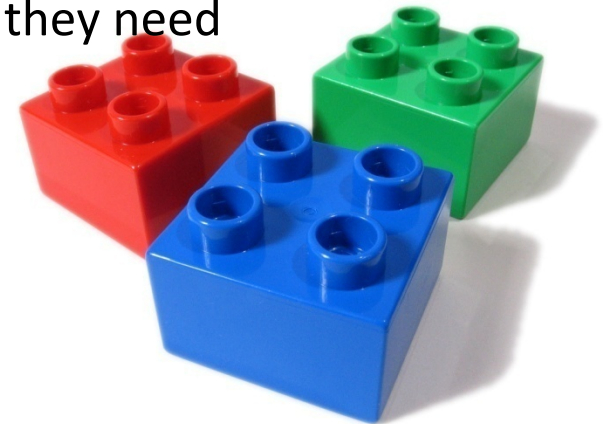
# Fences, Silos and Bridges

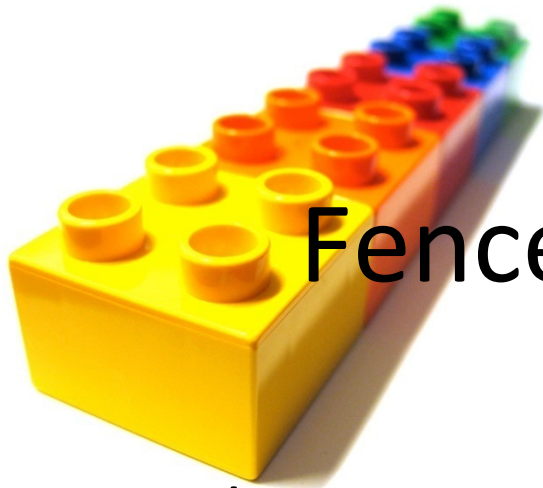
- Redefining “fence-sitting”
  - Usually means indecision
  - Could also mean mediation – from atop the fence, one can see both (or many) sides of a given line of demarcation
  - Another perspective – translating between two groups that speak different “languages”



# Fences, Silos and Bridges

- Silos in higher education – IT professionals vs. Users
  - Requests for data go to programmers or DBAs
  - IT perspective
    - What was requested?
    - What's the best way to get it out of the system?
  - User perspective
    - May not know how to ask exactly for what they need
    - Headcount vs. FTE



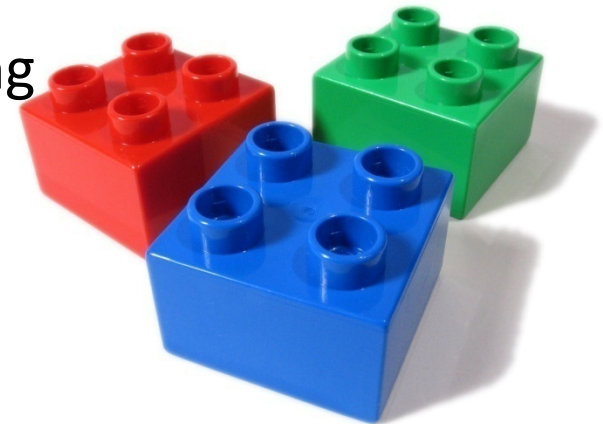


# Fences, Silos and Bridges

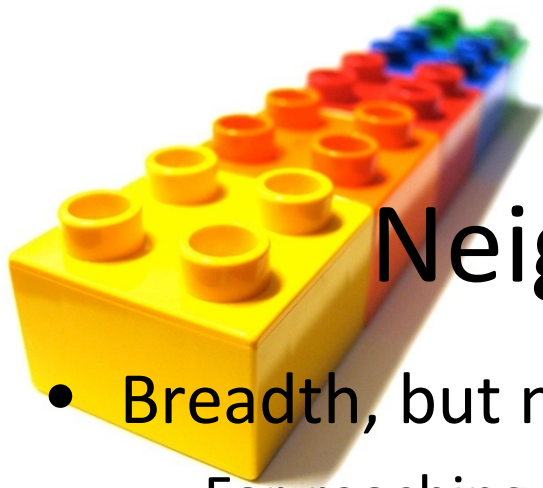
- Bridges
  - Build bridges between IT and Users
    - Probe users for what question they're trying to answer
    - Rephrase requests to IT in more precise language, e.g., specific data fields or elements, exact definitions and limits
    - Couch data in context on return to Users
  - Data interpretation – translation of data into meaningful information

# Big Bridges

- Federal and state priorities
  - How are we doing that here?
    - WI's focus on increasing the percent of baccalaureate degree holders
    - Equity Scorecard model – disaggregated data by specific target groups
  - Environmental scanning and networking





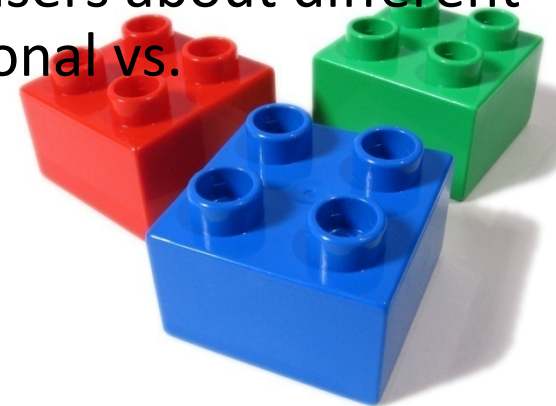


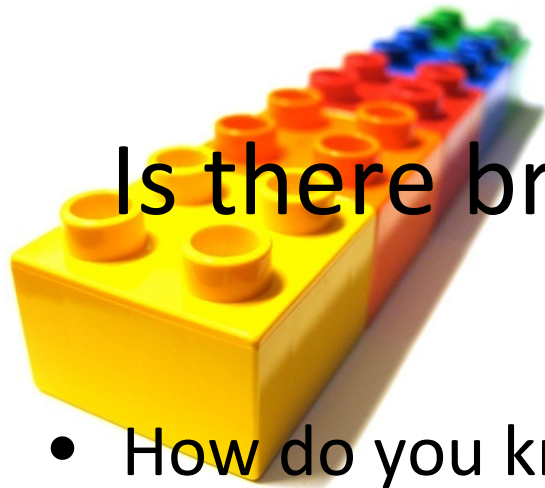
# Neighborhood Fences

- Breadth, but not usually Depth
  - Far-reaching use of data creates capacity to see over institutional fences
  - Economies of scope – IR sees “enough” to be able to fit big pieces together
- Data monkeys
  - Reporting needs require combining data across functional areas
  - Familiarity with “enough” allows IR to create linkages – interpreting between data, instead of people

# Hard Hat Time!

- Examine the relationship between IR and IT
  - IR by necessity is neither user nor IT professional – must find a middle ground that serves campus best
    - Access and support for IR
    - Systems integrity and workload concerns for IT
  - Are there multiple paths users can take to request data?
    - If so, do the people involved in those paths know each other enough to be able to refer things as necessary?
    - Changing campus culture can be difficult by may be necessary!
  - Be proactive in educating both IT and users about different data needs (e.g., operational/transactional vs. static/census day)





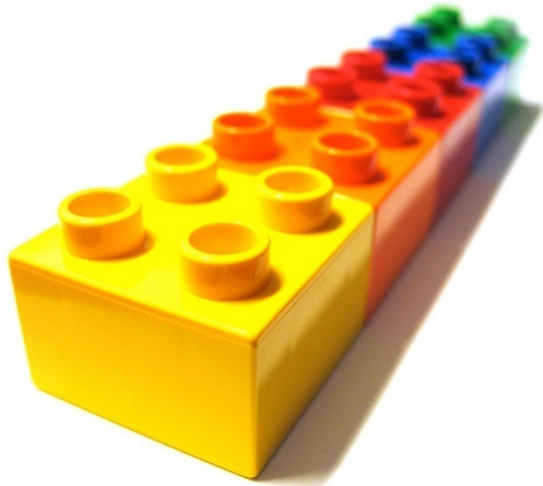
# Is there broccoli between my teeth?

- How do you know you're meeting campuses needs?
  - Find your squeaky wheels and bend over backwards to meet their needs
  - Probe – “I want to be sure to get you the best data for your question the first time, so can you help me understand what you're trying to do?”
  - Be reliable and predictable – set a standard response window and stick to it!

# Bean Counter..?

- Watch your language
  - Frame IR as “decision-support”
  - Instead of just providing data, provide context and interpretation as well
  - Build relationships with decision-makers and ask about what kinds of questions they’d like to be able to answer
- Claim your work
  - Add headers/footers to documents and reports with information on why to contact with questions
  - Create vehicles for distributing important information in smaller chunks to larger audiences





# Let's Talk

- What did I miss?
- What's worked for you?
- How can we help each other?

# Who are you again?

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