

W. Sam Adams phone interview of fall 2006

Who:

Dr. Sam Adams was a founding member of the Association for Institutional Research in the Upper Midwest. In 1974-75 he contributed significant leadership to the field of Institutional Research, by serving six year on the AIR Executive Committee 1978-1984 and presenting numerous refereed papers at the AIR Forum. He spent the 38 years of his fulltime professional career at the University Wisconsin-Oshkosh. He continues his professional contributions at the UW-Oshkosh and beyond.

Career:

Dr. Sam Adams started his career with AIR approximately 1968 as a research psychologist in the UW-Oshkosh's Testing and Research Center. Five years later he became the Director of Institutional Planning at UW-Oshkosh. He was involved in the national leadership of AIR first as a Secretary and later as President. His solid connection with AIR at the national level and his watching the formal organization of other regional AIR affiliates strongly motivated him to help lead the formation of informal state and regional groups, including the AIRUM. He became graduate dean at UW-Oshkosh in the early 1980s. He returned to IR as a Director of Total Quality Management (TQM) in the 1990s. He taught a graduate level research course from 1996-2000. He formally retired in June 2006 from UW-Oshkosh.

Changes observed in the field of IR:

In Dr. Adam's experience, quantitative data analysis prevailed in the 1960s, but it was qualitative analysis that received the emphasis in the 70's, 80's and 90's. Recently, with the 'No Child Left Behind' movement, demand for more quantitative analysis is back. In fact, there is now a healthy balance of both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Gradually, the mixed methods are being accepted more and more by administrators as their appreciation for strong institutional research grows.

Advice to the recent IR practitioners:

Dr. Adam's key advice to present IR practitioners is to not be over aggressive with their data, i.e., understand that most administrators can absorb only so much IR information at one time. He also suggested IR personnel be empathetic listeners and conservative and cautious in their generalization from data. Be sensitive to your work culture, i.e. provide just enough information to solve the problem.

Plans after retirement:

Currently Dr. Adams's is working quarter-time for the Dean of the College of Education and Human Service of UW-Oshkosh. Also, he is a third party evaluator for one of his local area school districts' major competitive grants. He has been invited to be a consultant on Strategic Planning at Wayne State College, in Wayne, Nebraska.