

Which Data for What:

Understanding the Difference between
Official and Operational Data Sources

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Intro to IRR

- Responsible for creating and reporting official data about OU
 - Monitor data quality
 - Track changes to federal and state reporting definitions and requirements
 - Provide decision support to administration



Why Does Data Source Matter?

- External expectations/mandates
- Comparability
- Timeliness
- Accuracy



Two Biggest Issues

- Which system(s) the data are drawn from – “system of record”
- Timing of the data – “as of”



General Terms

- Operational
- Official



Official or Operational?

- Operational Data
 - Also known as the ODS or Cognos or the Book
 - Is (usually) no more than 24 hours old
 - Is a copy of the transactional system
 - Use whenever current status is important, such as advising, course scheduling, etc.



Official or Operational?

- Official Data
 - Is frozen, sometimes referred to as a “snapshot”
 - May differ from operational system due to timing, corrections
 - Is set up for reporting using standardized definitions based on national norms and federal/state requirements



Official or Operational?

- Official Data
 - Available from IRR
 - Used whenever reporting to the outside world and when trend analyses are needed



Census Dates

- More about “snapshots”
 - Each one that IRR takes is more generally referred to in our reports as a **census**
 - It is a saved copy of data as of a single point in time, taken according to a predetermined schedule



Why Snapshots?

- Having data frozen at specific points in time allows for point-in-time comparisons
 - Year-to-year
 - Progress at different points in semester



Census Dates

✓ Official Reporting Date (ORD)

- Student data: after the add/drop period has ended; in fall/spring it is the first working day after three full weeks of classes, summer is more complicated so ORD comes later at more like the 8th or 9th week; sometimes referred to as “3rd week”
- HR data: the first working day on or after November 1st (after October payroll)



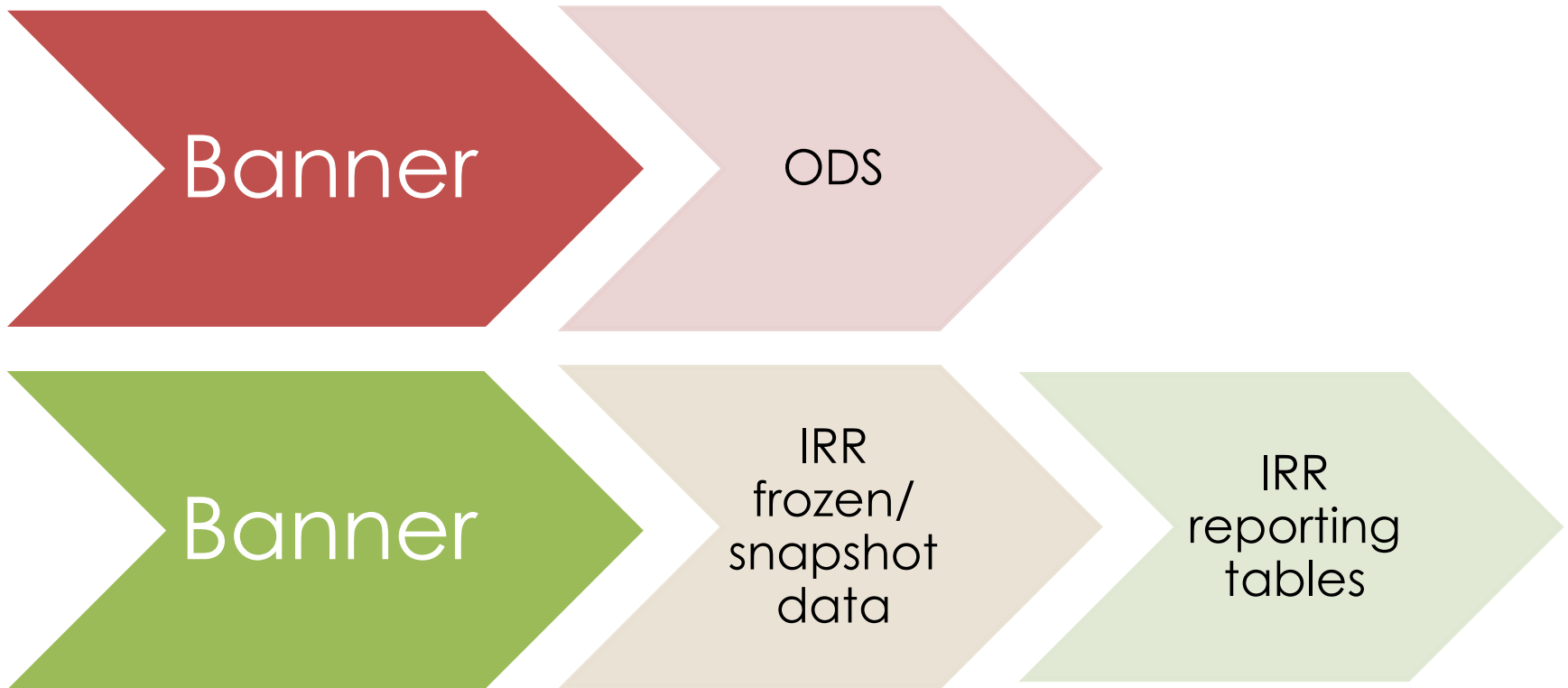
Census Dates

✓ End-of-Semester (EOS)

- After all classes have ended and all grades have been submitted – significant because Law gets 30 days to submit their grades, so there can be quite a lag between classes ending and the EOS snapshot
- Only applicable to student data



Same Original Source, Different Outputs



Why Doesn't Cognos Data Match IRR Data?

- Cognos data are refreshed nightly, while IRR data are frozen on specific census dates
- IRR uses definitions either imposed by federal/state agencies or in line with national **reporting** norms; these may not match operational usage rules



So How Do I Know What to Use?

- Will the data (potentially) be seen by deans/provost/other administrators?
- Will the data be shared with external agencies, such as program accreditors or media (especially the student newspaper)?
- Is it trend data?

*If the answer to any of these is **yes**, either use **official** data from IRR **or** check your methodology with IRR.*



So How Do I Know What to Use?

- Are you pulling the data for day-to-day operational use?
- Are you needing information on students that reflects status as of today, with all recent record changes included?

Operational data might be a better fit.



So How Do I Know What to Use?

It's easier to identify what does need to use official data than what doesn't.



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Clear Communication of Data Sources

- Providing clear identification of information is just as important as selecting the most appropriate data source
- Report titles, labels, and notes should be as **clear**, **consistent**, and **complete** as possible to prevent confusion and misinterpretation



Notes are Necessary

- ☐ Where did the data come from?
- ☐ On what date was the information extracted, and for what time period?
- ☐ Who/what is included/excluded, and why?
- ☐ What kinds of calculations/transformations have been done with the data, if any?



Notes are Necessary

- Lack of clear and complete labeling leads to confusion and decreased confidence in data provided.
- Sometimes data are actually “wrong,” but usually the real issue is they were not provided with all descriptive and contextual information needed to correctly understand them.



IRR Resources

- Reporting Definitions, Glossary and FAQ
<https://www.ou.edu/irr/helpful-hints>
- Email Support
irr@ou.edu
- In-Person Support – request a meeting!



Questions?

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