

NP 39 - Doing More Without Adding Headcount in Higher Education

Data can reveal patterns, but it can't tell the whole story. In higher education, where decisions about budgets, programs, staffing, and student success carry real consequences, relying on the numbers alone can leave out the context that matters most. The better approach may be to use data to identify what needs attention, then bring people into the conversation to understand why it's happening and what should come next.

That perspective is central to the work of Shari Veil, Provost and Chief Academic Officer at North Dakota State University. A North Dakota native and NDSU alum, Shari earned her PhD there before building a career in risk and crisis communication, research, and academic leadership. She held faculty and leadership roles at the University of Oklahoma and the University of Kentucky and most recently spent six years as Dean of the College of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln before returning to NDSU as provost.

In this episode, Shari explains why she makes a clear distinction between data-driven and data-informed decision-making and why, as she puts it, data should ask the question, not answer it. She shares how listening sessions with faculty and staff can uncover problems that never appear on a dashboard, why layers of administrative processes can pull people away from the work that matters, and how NDSU is taking a more strategic approach to hiring and resource allocation. We also discuss changing enrollment patterns, the impact of dual-credit programs, and why universities have to be willing to reconsider long-standing assumptions as student needs change.

Show Notes:

[02:40] Shari Veil shares her path through higher education leadership and her return to North Dakota State University as provost.

[05:24] Doing more with less means being more intentional about how institutions use their time, people, and resources.

[08:10] Responsible stewardship requires universities to ask whether each investment serves students and makes the best use of entrusted resources.

[10:24] Shari explains why data should inform decisions rather than make them and why human context still matters.

[13:28] Campus listening sessions reveal how policies, paperwork, and administrative workarounds can create barriers to the university's mission.

[17:03] Data should ask the question, not answer it, because understanding why something is happening requires engaging faculty, staff, and students.

[20:02] Strategic hiring shifts the question from who needs to be replaced to what the university needs now to best serve students.

[23:26] Changing enrollment patterns require difficult conversations about reallocating resources toward areas where student demand is growing.

[26:19] Shari discusses how dual-credit growth is changing course demand without diminishing the importance of foundational disciplines.

Links and Resources:

[Civitas Learning](#)

[Shari Veil - North Dakota State University](#)

[Shari Veil - LinkedIn](#)