



The beginning of the Southern Association for Institutional Research (SAIR) was an outgrowth of another group called the Southern University Group of Twenty-Five (SUG). The formation of SUG came about in the 1960s as a result of a regional workshop sponsored by the Louisiana State University and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). The workshop was held to discuss practical needs of institutional researchers in the southern region of the country. Essentially, the group was formed as a data exchange and information network for the major state universities in the region. For several years the members of SUG debated the issue of how best to provide a regional means to support their institutions as well as to aid their own professional development and that of their staffs. Primarily, two alternatives were considered: (1) the expansion of SUG, and (2) the formation of a new organization. When SUG elected to remain small and homogenous, in order to enhance data exchanges, James R. Montgomery, a member of SUG, took the initiative to form a new organization that would meet just before or after SUG and become a regional professional organization open to all who wished to join.

Jim Montgomery, with the help of Edith H. Carter, subsequently organized the first meeting of the Southern Conference on Institutional Research. The Conference was held at Georgia State University in Atlanta, simultaneously with the SUG-25 meeting; local arrangements were coordinated by Glynton Smith. In promoting the conference, Jim and Edith encouraged attendance from both two- and four-year colleges/universities, while ensuring appropriate sessions for both.

The first meeting in 1974 attracted a sparse (about fifty) but enthusiastic group of attendees, who encouraged the continuation of similar conferences. By 1977 the conference attracted about 150 people, which necessitated more structure. Due to this evolution, it became apparent that an association was needed for this growing number of interested participants. Thus, the attendees of the 1977 conference in Atlanta proposed and adopted a constitution (borrowed heavily from the North Carolina Association for Institutional Research) for the Southern Association for Institutional Research (SAIR). Barbara Holmes became the first president when the first slate of officers for SAIR was elected. Thereafter, the organization moved its meetings to various sites across the southern region and created a forum for the professional development of institutional researchers and planners in postsecondary education.

Later, in 1985, the three Southern region organizations of the Society for College and University Planners (SCUP), under the leadership of John W. Moore, began to schedule their meetings with SAIR. Witnessing an overlap of membership and topics of interest, the coordinators of the organizations agreed to establish joint conferences which provided mutual support and reinforcements for each of the organizations.

Since the first conference, membership of the Association has grown steadily. The members are broadly represented by the public and private colleges and universities throughout the region as well as many other educational enterprises. Throughout the years, many SAIR members have represented the Association well at national and international institutional research conferences.

The genesis for the Association is as valid today as it was in 1974--to provide opportunities leading to improved understanding and interchange of ideas through professional development and networking.