



# Electronic Portfolios for Accreditation?

Colleen A. Mayowski, EdD

University of Pittsburgh Institute for Clinical Research Education



## Introduction

- This study<sup>1</sup> aimed to measure the **prevalence** of institution-level eportfolio implementation at accredited United States colleges and universities for support of regional accreditation and/or reaffirmation.
- It was inspired by Trudy Banta's 2003 editorial<sup>2</sup>, in which she asked important questions about the future of electronic portfolios for accreditation.
  - Is the electronic institutional portfolio really the way accreditation self-studies will be **presented in the future**?
  - Must we continue to prepare a traditional narrative with links, so that in the end we can print it and send a **paper copy** to the review team?
  - Might we be allowed to **take full advantage of the capacity of the Web** to use a picture to convey a thousand words?

## Method

- Eportfolio definition developed based upon extensive literature review.
- Population: All US institutions of higher education accredited by 1 of the 6 regional accrediting agencies.
- Sample: 100 Accreditation Liaison Officers (ALOs) randomly chosen from each of the 6 regional accreditation agencies (N=600).
- Quasi-experimental design, stratified random sampling probability method.
- Anonymous, Web-based survey, email and postal invitation and reminders.

## Results

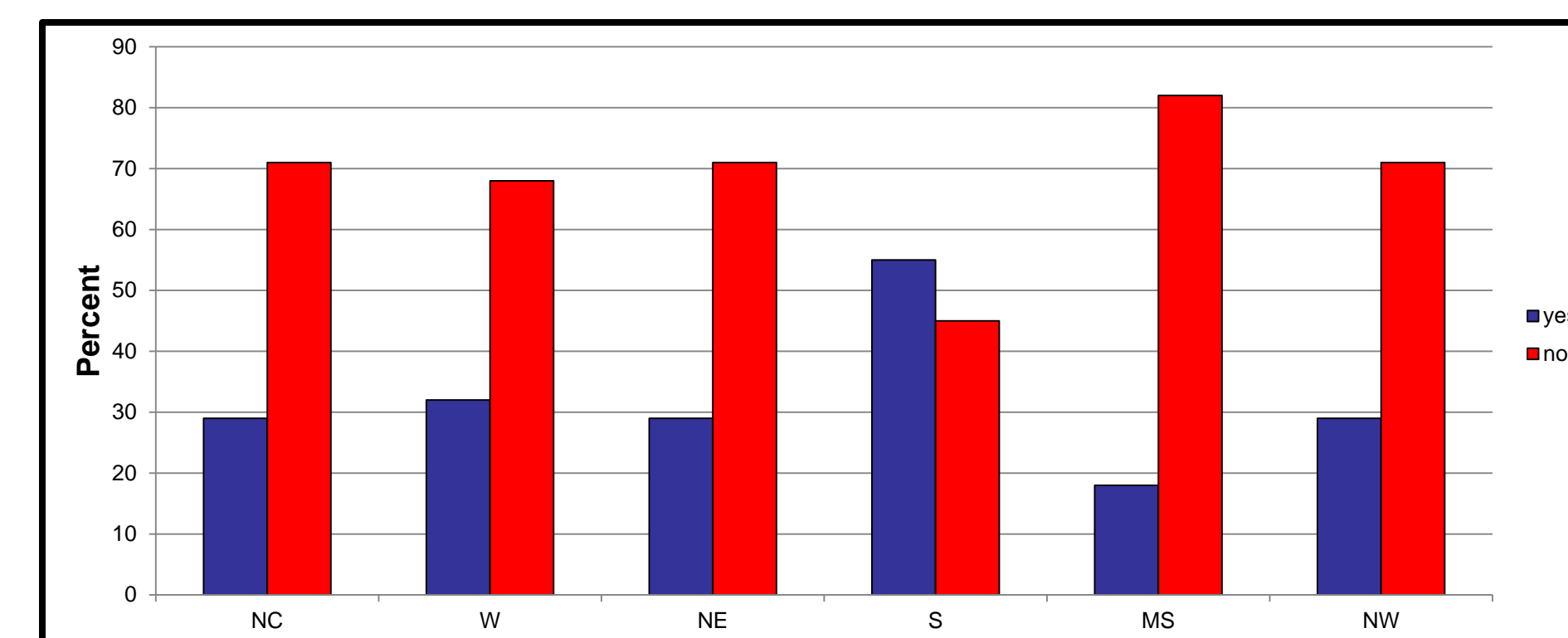
- Response rates were not sufficient to generalize to the population. Within these limitations, 95% confidence that the **true proportion of institutions that implement institution-level eportfolios for the purpose of accreditation** is between .25 and .38 (n = 193).
- Across all regions, predictions of future use are strong, with 62% of respondents (n = 190) agreeing or strongly agreeing.
- Most ALOs agreed that their regional accreditor required a paper version of the self-study in addition to an eportfolio version (n = 58).
- There was no strong consensus among ALOs regarding whether their accreditor encouraged the use of eportfolios (n = 188).

## Results (cont.)

### Prevalence?

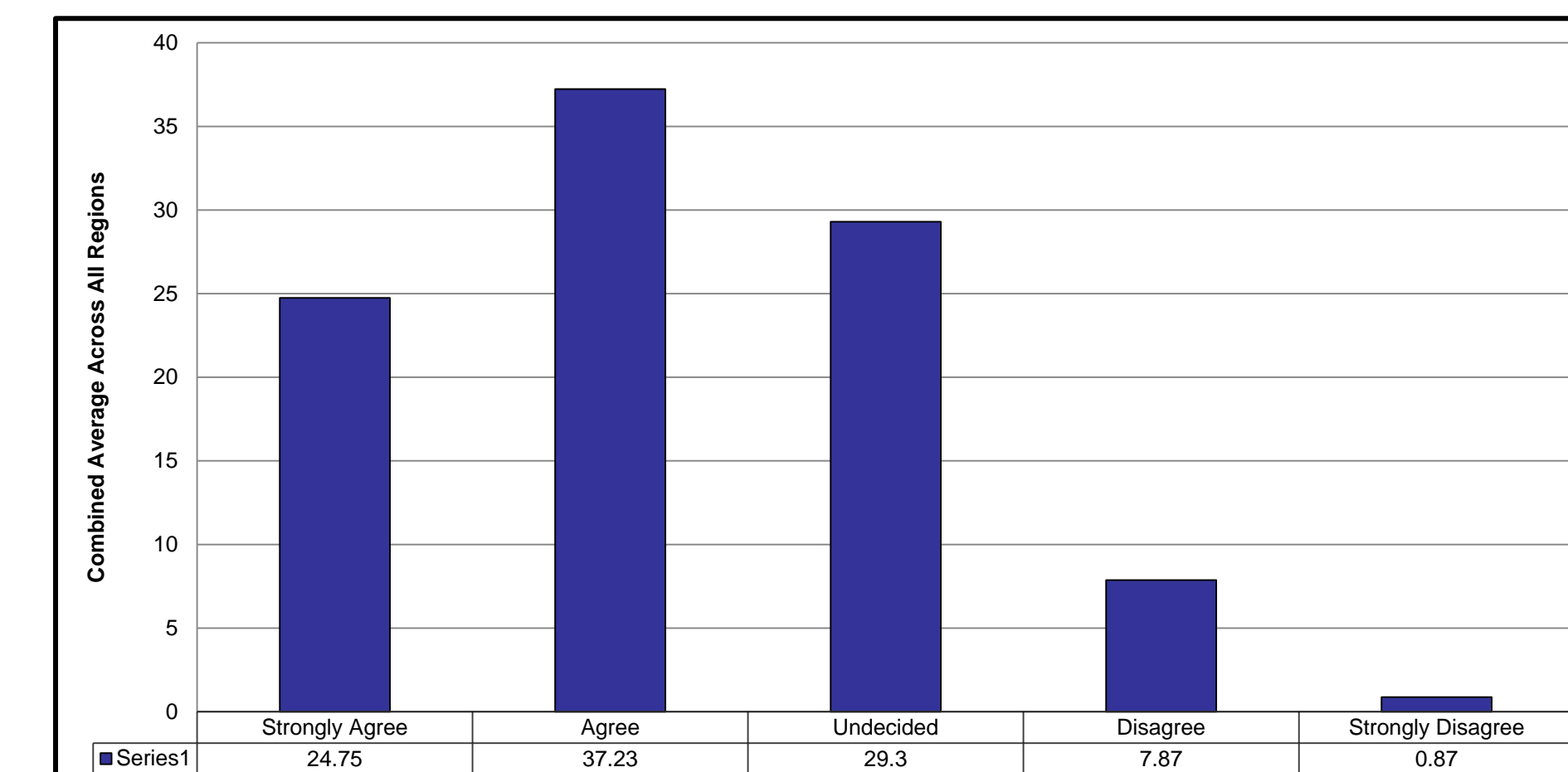
MS=Middle States  
NE=New England  
NC=North Central  
NW=Northwest  
S=South  
W=West

Does your institution currently use an institution-level electronic portfolio to help collect, prepare, and/or showcase evidence in support of regional accreditation or reaffirmation? (n = 193)



### Future Use?

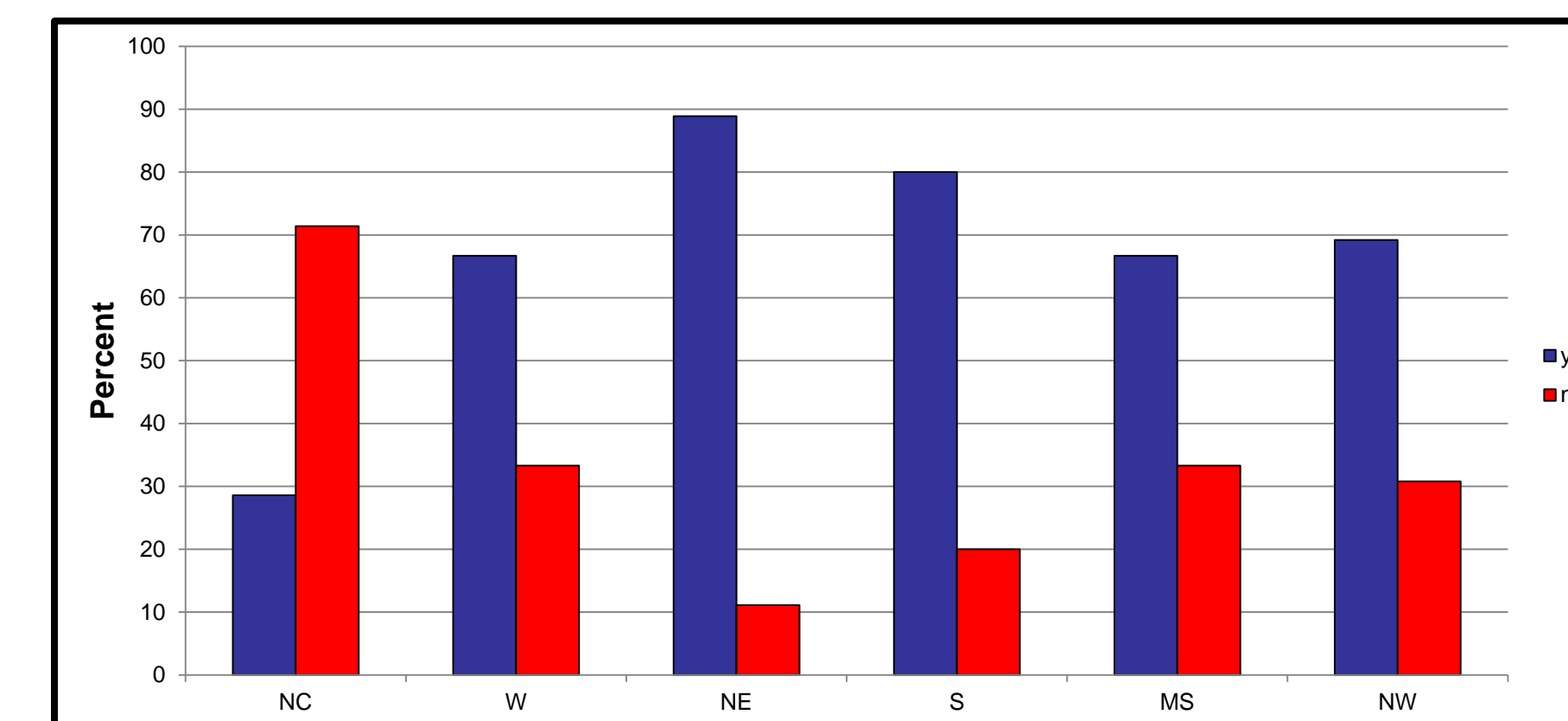
"Institution-level electronic portfolios are the way regional accreditation evidence, such as self-study documents, or enrollment or graduate data, will be collected, prepared, and/or showcased in the future." (n = 190)



## Paper Version Required?

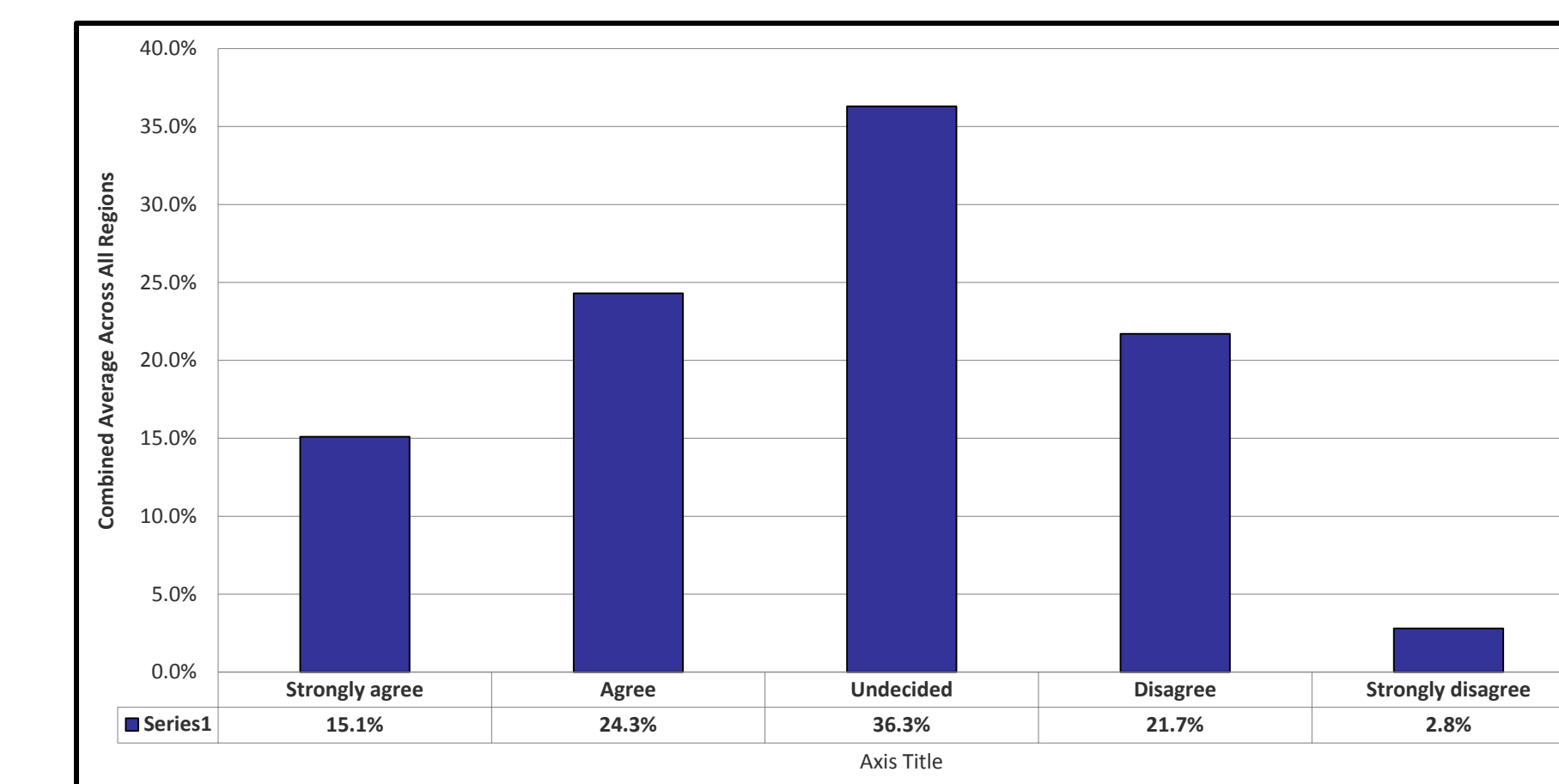
Does your institution's regional accrediting agency require your institution to prepare and submit a paper copy of the evidence presented in the institution-level electronic portfolio? (n = 58)

MS=Middle States  
NE=New England  
NC=North Central  
NW=Northwest  
S=South  
W=West



## Eportfolios Encouraged?

"My institution's regional accreditor encourages the use of an institution-level eportfolio to support reaccreditation or reaffirmation." (n = 188)



## Discussion

**Prevalence:** The extensive literature review carried out for this study found significant support for the use of eportfolios to support regional accreditation or reaffirmation. The responses to the survey indicate that this support is not carried over into practice. Survey participants indicate possible reasons for this include the lack of clear messages of support from regional accreditors, budget and staffing limitations, and faculty resistance.

The prevalence level might be different if the response rate to the survey had been higher. Although survey administration best practices were carefully followed, the response rate did not reach 53%, the level required for statistically supportable claims as determined by the power analysis.

**Future use:** The institutions who participated in the Urban Universities Portfolio Project (UUPP) likely would have expressed the same optimism when they were pioneering institution-level eportfolios for accreditation back in 1998. These pioneers felt they were "building a better mousetrap."<sup>2</sup> If they considered 2013 to be the future, their optimism has not been rewarded by the findings of this study.

**Paper version required:** Survey results indicate a paper copy of an institution's self-study is required by every regional accreditor. This finding is somewhat problematic because the results of the survey appear to indicate some confusion among the participants. This finding can be extended to indicate a possible lack of clear messaging from regional accrediting agencies.

**Eportfolios encouraged:** Maybe. Regional accreditors, and state and federal governments, are pressuring higher education institutions to provide publicly accessible proof of accountability and institutional effectiveness. Will higher education institutions ever be allowed to take full advantage of the capacity of the Web to use a picture to convey a thousand words? There seems to be no strong consensus among accreditation liaison officers—those who strongly agree or agree only slightly outnumber those who are undecided. It seems very unlikely that colleges and universities will invest the time and effort needed to produce an institution-level eportfolio without the clear support of their regional accreditor.

### Bibliography

- Mayowski, C. A. (2014) Eportfolios for Accreditation? Prevalence, Institutional Characteristics, and Perceptions at United States Regionally Accredited Institutions. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh. <http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/20906/>
- Banta, T. W. (2003). Electronic Portfolios for Accreditation?. *Assessment Update*, 15(4), 3.