STOP FLYING BLIND

USING DATA TO GET STUDENTS ACROSS THE FINISH LINE.

sponsor

Blackboard®

Education DIVE
Brand Studio
Now we know where to look and make evidence-based decisions on what is actually happening.

-Dennis Krieb

Half of all states allocate higher education dollars based on student performance rather than full-time student enrollment. And, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, another five states are transitioning to performance-based funding models. In the past, colleges and universities simply had to enroll students to acquire state money, but today’s institutions are being asked to do more. Now, degree completion is the qualifier.

Compare that with the skillset of college-bound seniors. More than half of all 2013 high school graduates took the ACT exam and barely over a quarter, 26%, met the ACT college readiness benchmark in all four subject areas measured — English, reading, math, and science. This means most college students start their higher education journey without key proficiencies necessary to succeed at a time when their success is a key accountability measure for their institutions.

Increasingly, campus administrators are turning to data analytics to figure out how to help students successfully transition into higher education and improve their chances to achieve a degree. So far, by bringing together information about student demographics, class structure, past student performance, student participation, and other markers, institutions have seen incredible improvements in retention and graduation rates.
At Lewis and Clark Community College in Illinois, using Blackboard Analytics to track data and act on its trends saved $700,000 over three semesters. There was a 17 point improvement in student retention within identified at-risk populations, and their continued tuition payments added up.

Dennis Krieb, director of institutional research and library services, describes Lewis and Clark’s model as a scorecard. Student characteristics like gender, full-time or part-time status, GPA, veteran status, race, and whether the student is a first-generation college-goer all factor into an overall quotient.

"The higher the number," Krieb says, "the higher we think you are at risk for not retaining."

Advisors get caseloads of students, broken down by their scorecard results. They see right away which students are most at risk of dropping out by analyzing various student characteristics. From there, they get information about progress and performance as it happens.

New this year, faculty members are required to give some type of assignment by week four in the semester in order to obtain critical data about students’ academic performance. This is then reported back to advisors who will contact students based on early warning triggers. No longer will a student be caught by surprise at the midterm. Students who don’t perform well on an early quiz or assessment will be contacted by their advisors. In some cases, it’s just an email or phone call. In other cases, it’s a visit.

Krieb said advisors can find out if there’s a problem affecting academic performance — an issue with childcare, transportation problems affecting attendance, or simply the need for a tutor. Within the first few weeks of the
By tracking data through Blackboard Analytics, Lewis and Clark was able to see that students in remedial classes, perceived to need extra support, were actually more likely than their peers to return the following year. They didn’t need as much attention as advisors traditionally thought. Krieb said data analytics has allowed administrators to move from relying on anecdotal to scientific evidence.

“That has really changed our philosophy a lot about what we should be looking at,” Krieb said. “Now we know where to look and make evidence-based decisions on what is actually happening.”

By looking at the connection between tutoring and retention, Lewis and Clark administrators found a nearly 25% difference in retention rates between students who access tutoring resources and those who don’t. With the data in hand, Krieb and his team were able to advocate for more funds to the tutoring program and justify them by connecting retention to tuition revenue.

Student retention isn’t the only place data analytics can be used in higher education, but it is an important one. Not much more than half of all undergrads get their degrees within six years, according to the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics. U.S. News and World Report points to data indicating as many as one in three first-year students won’t return for their second years. By harnessing data about these students and their activities, college officials can intervene before it’s too late.

In West Virginia, one community college increased its re-enrollment rate from one semester to the next by 23% after proactively calling and surveying students who didn’t re-enroll to find out why and how Pierpont could support them better.

Ron Weist is director of enrollment research and planning at Pierpont Community and
Technical College in Fairmont, WV. Through its outreach campaign, conducted by Blackboard, Pierpont discovered its student body was four times more likely to be reached by phone outside of standard business hours. A key piece of feedback in understanding why these students’ did not re-enroll was the fact that Pierpont’s enrollment support hours only spanned 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., when many of them worked full-time jobs, making it difficult for them to get through that process and stay on track with their academic goals.

“We recognize that each of the students who comes here has a goal, that they want to accomplish something,” Weist said. “They want to get a job, or get a better job, or improve the quality of life for their family. Whether they’re enrolled or not, our students still have those goals.”

The college hired a new enrollment counselor for after-work hours and saw a rapid spike in retention. Administrators quickly realized the savings found in student retention far outweighed the cost of surveying students and changing its own practices. Furthermore, Weist could rest easy knowing the changes helped the college serve its own students better.

From the beginning, the goal of the outreach campaign was always to encourage students to return to Pierpont and finish what they started. Leveraging Blackboard for this outreach allowed Pierpont to show their students that the school cares about their success and wants them to return. Current staff workloads did not provide enough time to make critical intervention calls that would, in turn, help retain students.

“It’s easy to dismiss the need for nontraditional support hours, but you can’t refute the data.”

“We recognize that each of the students who comes here has a goal, that they want to accomplish something,” Weist said. “They want to get a job, or get a better job, or improve the quality of life for their family. Whether they’re enrolled or not, our students still have those goals.”
Data analytics helped Pierpont connect its students’ needs with its own services, moving from anecdotal information guiding its initiatives to fact-based policies.

Terianne Sousa, director of education services at Blackboard, says data analytics help administrators debunk myths about why their overall retention and graduation rates are what they are. Pulling together demographic and financial information about students as well as information about their behavior in particular courses gives college officials a chance to identify cohorts, put targeted retention programs in place and then track the effectiveness of those programs.

This all prevents schools from making educated guesses about why students stay — or leave.

“And knowing why is really the majority of the battle,” Sousa said. “It prevents a trial and error approach to putting student success programs into place.”
For many institutions, student retention has moved from an altruistic ideal, to a priority for financial health and sustainability. By obtaining a holistic picture of student data, defining policies and programs, and understanding the impact they have, your institution can take the steps necessary to improve student success.

Blackboard’s Student Retention Solutions

**Insight:**
- Analytics Dashboard & Program Strategy
  - Provides insight to unique student population via Blackboard Analytics
  - Builds targeted student risk profiles via relevant data
  - Provides onsite training to better utilize Analytics

**Strategy:**
- Framework & Strategy
  - Provides recommended direction via Blackboard Strategic Services
  - Assesses institutional goals and resources for retention
  - Delivers recommendations to improve focus and strategy

**Engagement:**
- Proactive Outreach Campaigns
  - Delivers intervention to targeted students via Blackboard Student Services
  - Provides personalized outreach calls to get students to take specific action
  - Collects survey information and student risk reporting

Contact us today to determine which retention solution is right for you by emailing Retention@Blackboard.com or calling 800-424-9299.