

Let's Talk Learning Analytics and Student Retention

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This poster presents a summary of an Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching strategic commissioned project titled Learning Analytics: Assisting Universities with Student Retention. The project was descriptive and exploratory, with data collection occurring between July, 2014 and March, 2015. A mixed method design was employed. The project occurred at a time when many institutions were actively exploring their options so a primary focus was on highlighting crucial issues in relation to learning analytics implementation. Following the data collection phase, a framework and accompanying set of discussion questions were developed to emphasise the importance of systematic discussion in making sense of and harnessing the opportunities afforded by learning analytics for student retention purposes.

Keywords: Learning Analytics, Student Retention; Analytics Implementation;

Introduction and Description

The project focused on the following two research questions:

1. What factors are relevant or need to be considered where the implementation of learning analytics for student retention purposes is concerned?
2. How do these factors impact on the implementation of learning analytics for student retention purposes?

The research questions were investigated via a mixed method project design, deployed in line with an 'expansion' purpose (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989). Four data collection methods were employed:

- An institution level survey (n = 24), focusing on sector readiness and decision making around the use of learning analytics for retention purposes;
- An academic level survey (n = 353), focusing on teaching staff and other academic staff potentially involved with student retention. Questions focused on progress, aspirations and support needs;
- A series of follow-up interviews (n = 23), with academic level survey participants designed to expand on the implications of different activities and experiences with learning analytics to date; and,
- A suite of case studies (n = 5) developed by each of the research partner institutions detailing their experiences with learning analytics and demonstrating why elements in the framework are important.

Results, Conclusion and Further Resources

Following the data collection phase of the project a number of headline findings emerged relating to progress in the sector with regards to learning analytics and student retention. These were:

1. The sector in Australia is at an early stage of implementation and understanding around learning analytics;
2. Institutional context is critical and underpins the development, implementation and use of learning analytics;
3. Tensions exist around the extent to which learning analytics can drive actions and behaviours or take the functions of people;
4. Tensions exist between 'business' and 'educational' perspectives, aspirations and

- opportunities;
5. People across institutions have a key role to play in leveraging the opportunities of learning analytics which must take account of the relationships between strategy, planning, policy and action; and,
 6. The sheer variety of data means establishing relevant business and educational questions is critical.

The data was used to inform the development of the *Let's Talk Learning Analytics and Student Retention Framework*, which provides a framework and accompanying set of discussion questions to facilitate systematic, institutional discussion around implementing learning analytics. More information can be found on the project website www.letstalklearninganalytics.edu.au

References

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