

STUDENT RETENTION & SUCCESS 2017

LET'S TALK LEARNING ANALYTICS: DEVELOPING
FRAMEWORKS TO IMPROVE STUDENT RETENTION





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Statistics show that university attrition rates are at their highest level since 2004, with 17% of students not making it past the first year - increasing success and retention is critical for the higher education sector, with the total cost of first-year attrition estimated at more than AUD\$1 billion per year, but this is about so much more than attrition – it's also about ensuring students achieve to their full potential.

As a result, learning analytics has emerged as a key tool which many universities are leveraging to predict student behavior based on collected data, with the end goal to improve overall student retention and success.

In 2014, the Let's Talk Learning Analytics project was launched in partnership between five universities funded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching, to better understand how analytics can be successfully leveraged to aid student retention, success and overall experience.

Ahead of the 2017 [Student Retention and Success Summit](#) we chat to Deborah West, Associate Professor at Charles Darwin University. Deborah, who headed the Let's Talk project, explores the objectives and findings of the Let's Talk project, and shares how analytics can be leveraged as part of a strategic university plan to aid student retention.

LET'S TALK: PROJECT

PROJECT OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

2014 In late 2014 an institutional level survey investigating the approaches that institutions have made with regards to learning analytics and their future analytics plans was launched.

22 The Institution Level Survey was completed anonymously by 22 Australian and 2 New Zealand institutions and focused on senior level leadership.

78% Of the 353 people to complete the anonymous survey, 78% of of them were directly involved in teaching students.

23 In-depth interviews with participants from 15 institutions were conducted to provide explanation of some of the key issues raised in the quantitative data as well as practical examples of problems that academic staff are facing.



The purpose of this survey was to find out how academic level staff were thinking about learning analytics, what they are doing around student retention and what challenges and opportunities that they see existing with learning analytics

LET'S TALK: FINDINGS

DEVELOPING FRAMEWORKS FOR ANALYTICS

Results of the Let's Talk Learning Analytics project were greatly varied from institution to institution which is why Deborah, who headed the Let's Talk project along with five other learning institutions, worked to develop key frameworks or guidelines which could be applied on a case by case basis to suit each individual learning institution.

There were three key findings from the project, which helped shape the framework of factors relevant to institution level implementation of learning analytics for student retention.

- Firstly, learning analytics are incredibly variable across the sector. At an institutional level the sector as a whole is at a pretty early stage of thinking and developing learning analytics in Australia.
- Secondly, learning analytics are very context specific – so what works in one institution is not going to work in another, due to differing student cohort needs and overall institutional requirements. This is part of the reason that a flexible framework was developed.
- Finally, tensions exist around how learning analytics can drive actions and behaviors of people. The tension is around where institutions are using learning analytics and responder systems to engage students. Tensions emerge due to conflicting opinions regarding the need to personalise and individualise the student experience.





People across institutions have a key role to play in leveraging the opportunities of learning analytics and we need to really take into account the relationship between strategy, planning and policy in action.

In some institutions, learning analytics is sitting more in the IT department, so it is being driven by someone like the Chief Information Officer. In other institutions, it's being driven by the DVC Academic. The reality is that those two areas need to work together. Neither one can do learning analytics by themselves.

There are a whole range of findings there that reveal how important it is to establish relevant business and educational questions around learning analytics. Because you can use analytics from a whole range of perspectives - it can be from the institutional strategic point of view, but it can also be used from an on-the-ground point of view in terms of improving curriculum. These are two very different business cases, so it is important to understand this and drive learning analytics from both perspectives.



LET'S TALK: RETENTION

DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC INSTITUTION-WIDE RETENTION PLAN

A key issue with learning analytics that arose time and time again through survey findings and in-depth interviews throughout the Let's Talk project was the general hesitancy of learning institutions to prioritise data over the personalisation of the student experience.

"One of the big things we draw attention to in the framework, is that universities need to have a pretty clear retention strategy. I know that sounds really obvious, but it is not always the case," says Deborah. She adds; "potentially institutions could invest a lot of money in analytics, but not have it aligned in a way that is useful to a retention strategy."

Additionally, as Deborah highlights, besides aligning retention with a specific strategy, there is also a need to balance data with experience. "All the data in the world isn't actually going to increase retention. You actually have to do something with the data. It's about how you set up systems and facilities to actually engage with students in a personalised way that resonates with them. A lot of the tensions around learning analytics stem from the need to balance predictor systems with personalisation. Formulating a comprehensive business case and driving analytics from both the institutional strategic point of view and the on-ground point of view in terms of improving the curriculum is imperative to overall learning analytics success.

There are some really critical decisions that have to be made around learning analytics. If you don't look at the overall context, and your retention strategy and how it all aligns, then of course your analytics are probably not going to be helpful for retention. Through the Let's Talk programme we really wanted to provide a framework for that decision making process. "



To hear more about leveraging data and analytics to develop and institutional strategy to aid student retention, and ultimately success, join us at Student Retention and Success 2017.

The event, held in Melbourne on the 30th – 31st May, brings together over 20 industry experts from universities across the country and provides an ideal networking and thought sharing environment.

To secure your ticket to the event and for special early bird prices simply fill in the [form](#) and send to registration@iqpc.com.au.