SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY BUSINESS OFFICERS

INNOVATE – EDUCATE – ADVOCATE – LEAD

2024 Best Practices Submission

Presentation Title:
Analyzing Affordability's Impact on Retention

Presenters:
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Presentation Description:
When students exit with excessive debt, neither they nor their institution benefit. Identifying these students early in their academic career is key to effective interventions, and yet there exist significant barriers to early identification. Join Chief Information Officer Penny Evans-Plants and Director of Enterprise Analytics Zach Sherwin as they explore how Berry College was able to swiftly implement analytics solutions which addressed both cultural and technical barriers, generating rapid ROI for both Berry College and our students.

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Statement of the Problem:
Enrollment Management was able to accurately identify students likely to exit with excessive debt, we faced challenges operationalizing these identifications. Our analyses required extensive time and effort to conduct each and every time, which limited our ability to apply them in a timely manner.

Identify the Solution:
Information Technology partnered with Enrollment Management to rapidly develop and implement analytics solutions to address the above. We worked closely with Admissions, Financial Aid, and the Vice President of Enrollment Management to understand the needs and requirements of those offices. We focused first on value-add and requirements, rather than technology.We evaluated our technical analytics infrastructure requirements and discovered that in-house administration and engineering of our data lake and data warehouse was minimally aligned with strategic priorities, so we identified an outside partner to handle those functions This allowed us to focus on business needs instead of getting bogged down in highly sophisticated technical challenges.We designed, drafted, and developed an analytics data

model designed to capture and reflected existing institutional knowledge (rather than re-engineer insights that our Enrollment Management staff have already discovered). This model was rigorously vetted and tested by users from multiple departments. Enrollment Management analysts were then trained to customize and develop analyses using this data model, ensuring a self-service approach and reducing risks of IT serving as a bottleneck. Prior to this, analysts' work might have been 90% data transformation and 10% harvesting insights. By eliminating the data transformation elements, analysts are able to focus purely on achieving business ends by harvesting insights. Finally, we worked with our Vice President of Enrollment Management to roll out an executive-level app which he can use on any device to consume the dashboards created by analysts.

Implementation Timeline:

1. User Story Collection: Start by gaining a deep understanding of the barriers to success and where ROI is most feasible.

2. User Story Prioritization: Identify which narrativized elements are most aligned with strategic priorities. For those not aligned, either postpone or outsource.

3. Dataset Design: Connect user stories to a proposed data model. Ensure that the proposed model can address strategically aligned requirements.

4. Dataset Development: Work closely with analysts and engineers across the institution to ensure that the model is resilient, sufficiently complete, and generates required insights.

5. Train Analysts: Promote a self-service model and reduce IT bottlenecks by training analysts in how to use the new analytics infrastructure.

6. Senior Leader Enablement: Work directly with senior leaders to understand which analyses they need access to, and identify the delivery methods most probable to ensure effective utilization.

Benefits & Retrospect:
Our graduates experienced a decrease in average debt at graduation of over $3500 compared to prior years. 10% fewer students are now taking on loans. We reduced the number of students graduating with any debt from 61% before intervention to 56% post intervention. The Enrollment Management team is now equipped to conduct analyses of timely debt-related data with few barriers and without being bottlenecked by analyst availability or technical infrastructure limitations.