

Harnessing data insights to boost student success

By [Robert Speed](#)

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There is an increasing trend towards leveraging data-driven insights into student behaviour to enhance attainment, retention and student well-being, as higher education institutions begin to recognise the key role that learning analytics can play in maximising student success.



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Thus, higher learning institutions are increasingly focusing on using technology to better understand their students and reinvent systems, culture and process to bolster student success. Technology is especially critical when it comes to using student data to improve retention and completion rates.

However, aside from using data insights to improve student success, educational institutions also need to be able to make data-driven business decisions that will allow them to develop a coherent, analytical and driven ecosystem that provides for real-time exchange of skills and knowledge.

Blackboard is moving towards Software as a Service (SaaS) as a way of delivering our products to clients. This has been a long-term aspiration and the motivation behind our partnership with Amazon Web Services (AWS).

Relevant data sets

By leveraging its partnership with AWS, as well as technology partner Snowflake, which offers data warehousing solutions, Blackboard is not only able to provide its clients with relevant data sets that can be used for decision making and business intelligence but can also build a data warehouse for each of its SaaS clients.

The DIY solution for educational institutions has typically been to invest in data warehousing solutions – traditionally an on-campus data warehouse – and a database or a database server, where they would store data that has been pulled from multiple sources.

As this raw data is obtained from various systems, in some cases in different formats, with different authentication processes, it can be complex. Therefore, it must first be joined together and restructured to be optimised for reporting and then plugged into a reporting layer that's built for end-users.

This is something that educational institutions have been doing for a while, but it takes a lot of money and effort to build, maintain and support these systems. Some institutions don't have the capabilities or the capacity to do this successfully.

Doing the heavy lifting

With Blackboard, we aim to do a lot of this work for them, and a solution like Blackboard Data can pull together data from various data sources, remodel it in such a way that it is in the ideal structure for reporting purposes.

The top data points that most educational institutions rely on are lagging indicators, that determine whether a student is performing successfully, and leading indicators that identify practices that are aligned to student success.

Typically, the assumption is that the more engaged and active a student is within the virtual learning environment, the better. For example, an institution can monitor how often a student accesses a course, as well as their level of activity and engagement. Appropriate interventions can then be made based on this data.

The modern-day higher education experience is becoming increasingly more digital, and therefore generates volumes of data that can be explored and analysed. Institutions can gain countless meaningful insights from this pool of data, which will enable them to shape service delivery throughout the student journey.

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