

Higher Education Working Group Meeting Notes

Friday, March 17, 2017

11:30am-12:30pm

Topic: Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) presents 14 case studies highlighting ways in which institutions use student level data to improve student outcomes
15 attendees

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This study was designed to look for ways to broaden the conversation of data use in higher ed – directly addressing how are institutions currently working with student data to evaluate access and success (both for students and the institutions themselves).

Discussion points:

- Strong message of equity
 - o How are we using transactional data to assist students not only getting into a postsecondary institution, but also in succeeding once they are there?
- IPEDs systems: how are we using data about what students are doing to make better choices
 - o GA State is a top example of using data to close achievement gaps, and other campuses are starting to use that methodology
 - o The case studies also provide examples of predictive analytics that were used to intervene before students “get in trouble”

Three main discussion focuses in case studies:

1. Combining data across systems –
 - a. Provide better data to student and stakeholder
 - b. Example: University of Texas pulls in state workforce data. The tool was designed with students in mind. They can see the kinds of jobs/salaries that people can expect with this degree.
 - i. Informs students about options while not limiting those options.
2. Bridging data across Universities –
 - a. Example: University of Michigan has a digital coaching platform that is designed to provide personal assistance to students in classes and across institutional programs. It tells students what they need to get from this class and from next class, and provides personalized training and instruction based on prior students’ experiences in that class.
3. Creating a campus culture of data use and improvement –
 - a. System-wide. This includes statewide educational system components as well as overall stakeholder attitude
 - b. Example: University of Miami is very proud of their work here.

Further Discussion:

- “Who” students are varies – knowing who this population is (v. first time/full time, now have older, families, working, multi-institutions, dual-enrollment)
 - o Students more mobile – tend to go to more than one school – on-campus predictive analytics need full record from previous institution – what classes they took; correlations between programs; etc.
 - o Changing demographics of students changes role of University – change services provided, change demands schools make on them – change focus of what help they might need
- On-going nat’l conversation about nat’l student unit records system – ongoing advocacy to remove ban – but even that’s not enough anymore
 - o As we talk holistically – need student data network – federal or national level to get bigger better picture of what’s happening with students
 - o Example of things being done in the interim: “SAM” used data from NSC – to provide more holistic outcomes – as they move between inst’s (student achievement model)
 - o How can we do that better – raise conversation – make more visible to stakeholders?
- Evaluating campuses and their use of these data/analysis – need right standards/metrics – for current campus makeup
- Confirmed the central role and focus on privacy and security – the conversation is on using data appropriately –
 - o New Am has great new report on ethical use of student data – “not getting caught in the echo chamber” – using historical data as predictive, are we creating self-fulfilling projections? Being aware of that, and taking care to try and not let that happen.
 - o This APLU Report doesn’t go into all the data “weeds” due to space – but conversations happened in the process – not make inappropriate assumptions; leave open flexible pathways for students – clear intent – Feed into culture of inquiry – how campuses are using their data
- Other conversations that are happening re nat’l student data network – important to making sure campuses have access as well as providing data in – that they can pull data out
 - o Campuses concerned about putting data in but not having access to do the studies or get the results they need to help themselves. Need clearinghouse model (if not NSC) to make sure that’s possible – must monitor to respond and make changes – utility is in ongoing access at campus level
 - o How do we do that – ensure privacy and security – but make useful data available

- Important to present value (these case studies) as balance to risk. Transparent about what we can answer now and what we “could” answer if we had this data

Q & A:

Q’s – How are students being informed that their information is being used, and what other transparency/notice/consent info is available?

A – Currently this is primarily happening through FERPA notifications; there are concerns whether this is not sufficient.

- Maybe students don’t really know or understand what they’re agreeing to because that’s such a non-questioning process at this point.
- Can use data to guide and improve campus programs without permission – accountability and assessment.
- For IPAS - more rigorous disclosure, but maybe not in other contexts.
- Not sure of opt-out choices available at this point; should be included in future iterations?

Q – Just to clarify – this study not only tracks full-time/first-time, but the broader student community? Community colleges? (interacts with Nat’l Student Clearinghouse?) – since full-time/first-time students are not the majority anymore

A – Example: SAM is able to do this

- Advantage is to track across institutions and dual enrollments (on-line; comm college; etc.) More powerful – and important in reviewing what is a ‘normal’ pathway now.
- Univ making new agreements with feeder schools and working toward that end.
- Predictive analytics and IPAS – every student on campus is eligible but their history may or may not have been pulled in.
- Not necessarily a detriment – for these uses don’t actually need 100% involvement for aggregated trends and levels, but must keep human element – can’t just rely on model – a tool to be used by human advisors.
 - Can’t know “positive” Or “negative” experience just based on grades. But it’s a tool to help limit uncertainty

Q – In the Texas example, how much labor/salary data of alumni are made public? How is it aggregated and protected?

A – Different in different situation – campuses pulling in data from other sources – from NSC – sometimes creating longitudinal database, other time just added a field or two to their current student record. Becomes part of the student record, subject to same restrictions at that point.

- Results used more anonymously – characteristics without particulars.
- Workforce data in particular – handled through the office managing it – do a lot of cleaning and handling/managing themselves or with state IT resources; publicly available data is all anonymized.
- Careful to limit field sizes – looking at outcomes by fields – if “n size” is too small, results not shown. Focus on confidentiality and privacy.
- Provide “more complete view” of options, but not “exhaustive” – do we really need to know what happens to “every” student – or do we just need big picture. Percentages, etc.

Q – Who is designing to ensure DeID, PII protections, etc.?

A – The people running these analytics are generally very privacy/security focused – definitely one of the areas where there are the most questions, and good understanding of the need to get it right the first time.

- IHEP involvement has been focused on that perspective as well.
 - o Important to address concerns, or even perceived concerns.
 - o Data folks may believe low risk, but how to share that broadly. What data are we talking about including – very clear about data elements, what would be shared, what protections would be in place

Q – We have found in message testing that people already assume some of these data metrics are available – salary outcomes, etc. – and are surprised to know it’s not more broadly available/centralized. How to address expectations of availability v. privacy concerns.

A – Yes – and the piece (framing) not emphasized enough is the discussion about what we “can’t” do or “don’t” know yet. What we could do if we had access to better data.

- Must increase awareness and ID that gap
- Lots of campuses DO have as much of this as people may think, but it’s hard won and maintained, not always highest quality, and too time intensive to collect and maintain for it to be long-term or to collaborate.
- Even more important when shared across broader partners that data be sufficiently reliable and consistent.

Wrap-up:

Please follow #data4students on Twitter to follow case studies and awareness for what we can do with data aplu@data4students.org gets you to the case studies. Ask critical questions.