

Utilizing Technology to Increase Student Retention

For Online and Blended Learning



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An ongoing issue for online and blended education is student retention. There are many ways in which technology can increase the odds of course completion and facilitate overall student achievement and success. **The ability to appropriately detect, assess, and intervene in a timely manner to prevent student withdrawal or failure is possible through communication and reporting tools that interpret and manipulate data in ways administrators or educators could never accomplish alone. This data, used responsibly, insures a higher level of retention for students to see them through to graduation.**

There are four features that every administrator should seek from their student information system (SIS) to maximize student retention and student success. While each of these four features should be effective on its own, using them in conjunction with each other exponentially increases the odds of student course completion and success.

1. Personalization Through Facilitated Communication, Tracked for Oversight
2. Pacing – Academic Intervention Strategies

3. Student Access to their Plan of Study
4. Analytical Data and Reporting

1. Personalization through Facilitated Communication

Studies show that faculty – student communication during the first 2 weeks of class greatly increases the chance of course completion! Intuitive communication tools for interaction between students and their learning institutions are key to academic success, particularly in the online world. If the lines of communication are readily available and easy to use, the chances that students will reach out to their teachers or professors for support and guidance increases dramatically. In this way, effective, intuitive communication capabilities such as SMS text, email, two way messages, and an in-the-face announcement board enables an educator to easily and frequently personalize communication with his or her students, and increases the likelihood of their doing so. An educator who effectively communicates with his/her students sets the stage for effective learning and student success.

If communications are tracked by the SIS, administrators can confirm that faculty is doing its job to personalize the education experience by setting parameters for periodic student contact and, ultimately, early intervention.

Teacher Contact History 							
Student	Section	Start Date	End Date	Last Contact	Days	Phone	Contact
Atkins, Iliana	American Literature - Sec. 1	1/1/2015	12/31/2015	12/11/2015 12:26:13 PM	36	(589) 421-7750 (Mobile)	
Sandbox, Student	American Literature - Sec. 1	1/1/2015	12/31/2015			(166) 418-9099 (Home)	

Communication should begin with a 24/7 portal where students begin the application process, receive notifications, and, once enrolled, receive grades and communicate actively with their instructors. Providing students with a single hub for all their activities, and single-sign-on to courses, makes the learning process a fluid one.

We all love recognition; what better way for a student to feel recognized than to get a welcome phone call, personal email, or even an SMS text message from his or her instructor when enrolling in a class; after performing well on a test; or a gentle nudge if they fall behind on an assignment? A two-way communication feature allows instructors and students to stay informed and collaborate any time they please or feel the need. When students experience personalized attention, it helps them realize that their goal of graduation is shared by their instructors and institutions, which magnifies its significance. Student who receive regular communication are much more likely to stay the course!

From an administrator's perspective, it is important to personalize the ongoing volume of communications that occur daily with the entire student body. Regardless of an institution's admissions process, there are many opportunities to make the experience a more personal one. Even a program structured for auto-enroll can be configured to send out personalized automated emails informing students of their application status at each step of the process. Some institutions may include a series of welcome calls, interviews and personalized messages, all of which

should be facilitated by the work flow inherent to the SIS. An institution that is willing to invest in personalizing the experience will realize a greater likelihood of long term commitment by the student.

2. Pacing – Academic Intervention Strategies

End Date	Curr. Grd.	Final Grade	Pacing	Edit	Un-Enroll	Xfer	LM
12/31/2014	90.00		169 12 19				✓
1/5/2014	88.00		126 18 13				✓
12/31/2014	88.90		198 166 29 14 5				
12/31/2014	89.00		120 166 13 33 2				
12/31/2014	96.79		198 166 33 10 5				
12/31/2014	93.44		198 166 36 7 5				
12/31/2014	94.17		198 166 46 1 1				
12/31/2014	93.03		198 166				

Once a student falls critically behind, they feel overwhelmed. Then, the tendency to drop the course increases exponentially. To avoid reaching this critical point, it is imperative to have a method of identifying key triggers such as a failed test, lack of virtual attendance, or missed assignment submission early on. This provides educators a means to see, at a glance, when it's time to reach out. The all-important Pacing Module should require educators to generate personalized template email alerts that send the moment any of these triggers are identified. These triggers may include missing assignments, grades that go below a pre-determined level, or they can be configured according to each instructor's or institution's individual philosophy. At-risk students will therefore benefit from immediate interventions throughout the school year. In addition, a profile can be developed to set up recurrent communication with students on a weekly, bi-monthly, monthly, or end-of-term basis to reduce the likelihood that a student will go unsupported and slip through the cracks.

3. Student Access to Their Plan of Study

Providing a Plan of Study that is automatically updated in real-time on each student’s portal gives him or her a personalized and efficient roadmap to graduation. Students and advisors can manage the academic graduation path jointly if given the ability to review, alter, and monitor course load based on the success of their progression. Administrators can make strategic decisions based on accurate curriculum and class forecasting. Allowing students to follow their graduation path gives them a view of what they have accomplished, as well as a reminder that there is “a light at the end of the tunnel.”

4. Analytical Data and Reporting



At Risk Students

Grade: C-			
Student	Organization	Section	Teacher
Terrell, Abel	BocaVox Academy School	FL History Sem. 1 (SECTION 6)	Terrell, James
Williams, Jesse	Cocoa High School	Biology (Grad) Semester 1 FA10 Section 2	Terrell, James
Wright, Steven	BocaVox Academy School	FL History Sem. 1 (SECTION 3)	Williams, Cheryl
Wright, Crystal	BocaVox Academy School	FL History Sem. 1 (SECTION 5)	Wright, Brian
Wright, Yvonne	Plantation High School	English 4 Sem. 1	Wright, James
Wright, Angela	BocaVox Academy School	US History & Geography Sem 1 (SECTION 2)	Wright, Linda
Wright, Larry	BocaVox Academy School	Project Management Hands on Introduction - Sec. 2_This is a test section_Do not use this section for enrolling students	Wright, Dean
Grade: D			
Student	Organization	Section	Teacher
Wright, James	Cocoa High School	Geometry Sem. 1	Wright, Brian
	Spanish River High School	Chemistry Sem. 2	

Technology serves as a vital tool that empowers administrators to utilize data-driven decisions and achieve their mission of excellence by focusing on teaching and learning. Deputy Secretary and Chief Operative Officer of the United States Department of Education says, “Right now, because of the lack of transparency on outcomes, people focus on lots of other things.¹” An entire school could be labeled as a failure when really the problem lies in a single concept. Colleges are lauded by their reputation even though their graduates battle unemployment. Therefore, the ability to create “on-the-fly” fields and reporting is a must to serve the ever increasing demand for analytical data to facilitate constant and accurate assessment, decision making, planning, and compliance updates. Administrators can independently generate targeted reports and analytics on a daily basis without having to go through their IT department. This bird’s-eye-view helps monitor all aspects of their processes from enrollment trends to academic performance.

Institutions that are successful in building meaningful settings for learning are successful in retaining their students. Technology helps support student retention by relieving educators of tedious tasks, giving them time and freedom to concentrate on teaching and personal engagement.

1. Ferenstein, Gregory. "The Man Who Wants to Fix Education's Secrecy Problem." *Co.Exist*. 1 July 2014.
<http://www.fastcoexist.com/3032562/the-man-who-wants-to-fix-educations-secrecy-problem>