At-Risk Students

How a Learning Management System Can Help

A Strategy for Intervention

It is imperative institutions understand and address the challenges surrounding at-risk students by putting an action plan in place to improve college readiness, and by establishing better early warning and intervention systems for students at risk.

While it is a daunting challenge facing U.S. institutions, the answer to the "at-risk" dilemma does not have to be overly difficult and expensive, or require a highly complex early warning software system. Indeed, for those institutions who already have a learning management system (LMS) in place to enable online or hybrid learning, the answer to identifying and assisting students at risk could be very close at hand. Let's look at some possible components of "students at risk" strategies and examine where an LMS can play a role.

A Student Success Mindset

Benefits of intervening early can't be stressed enough. The challenge for educators from an institutional perspective is to develop a "best-fit" intervention strategy. This begins, however, by ensuring that student success is a prominent part of the educational institution's mission. Like it or not, there are still some schools and some faculty members who take the view that failure is part of life. Having the right institutional culture is an important foundation for a successful intervention strategy.

Better K-12 scaffolding

With many high school students arriving at university or college ill prepared, one must look to K-12 schools and districts to build a strategy for long-term student success. Such strategies may include, providing scaffolding at the K-12 level to guide them to the right degree or college program. Helping high school students prepare adequately by understanding an individual's interests and strengths is key. It should also involve proper academic advisement and guidance, to help direct students to the right field of study and to help them establish good study and learning habits.

Assess at Time of Admission

There are several early warning signs that allow an institution to quickly identify a student at risk, often before or at time of admission. This allows the institution to proactively offer assistance to at-risk students from the earliest days. For instance, many institutions in the U.S. today run summer orientation programs–ranging from a fully online to a blended learning experience–to prepare students for a successful academic experience.

Potential Early "At-risk" Warning Signs

- Poor high school performance
- Enrollment in historically challenging majors
- Students with learning disabilities
- Socioeconomic background of the student

When a student arrives in September to begin school, institutions can have a plan of action in place.

Enact Proactive Student Support Strategies

A proactive student support strategy can establish a structured pathway toward degree completion. This might involve regular meetings with counsellors to set goals and polish study habits and the encouragement of an academic mindset that allows the student to tackle one course at a time. The difference between a student who succeeds and one who fails is often routed in the strategies they utilize to overcome obstacles and barriers.

Ensure Ongoing Academic Monitoring

Ongoing academic monitoring for the first couple of years is important. Academic advisors should be monitoring student performance in "gateway" courses for discipline-specific programs to make sure that students perform at the levels they need to succeed and complete their program. If a student wants to pursue a bachelor's degree in nursing, that student must be able to successfully complete the basic biology, anatomy, and physiology courses required.

Helping the student to monitor their performance and develop proper expectations early on in their academic career will encourage them to persist in their academic journey.

Implement a Strong Data Management Strategy with an LMS at the Core

Data from day-to-day student interactions with an LMS, predictive analytics based on historical performance of students in a specific course or large cohorts of students, combined with business intelligence from other data sources is instrumental in helping academic institutions pinpoint and help students at risk. Most importantly, an LMS-based data solution uses existing technology at hand.

Using your LMS as an Early Warning System

When you have a group of students interacting with an LMS on a daily basis, every interaction with the system is captured as a data point. All of this information at a classroom and course level is then translated back into dashboards providing faculty (and the student) with a snapshot of their progression. The student's mere interaction with the LMS itself (or lack of interaction as it were) becomes an early warning signal. Through the dashboard, faculty review overall trends for the class, see the outliers in terms of engagement with content, and assess a student's activity against expectations. Leveraging that business intelligence, instructors can then use features within the LMS such as intelligent agents to kick off automatic messages to students as checkpoints and reminders, or use release conditions to trigger remediation measures within the system. For at-risk students learning online, the LMS also provides the ability to simulate face-to-face interaction, an important capability for students to know someone is paying attention to them and that they are important. For instance, an instructor can send a video note allowing the student to put a face to a name which increases instructor presence and provides the student with the sense there is someone there for them.

Predictive Analytics

In instances where an instructor has been teaching the same class for a long time, or in circumstances where there is a large class of students, an LMS can capture volume data that reveals student behavior over time. This information can then be used to build a predictive model to help spot a student at a higher likelihood of risk. With the rise of machine learning it is also now possible for models to self-adapt based on changing patterns of behavior, allowing a predictive model to respond dynamically over time to continue to accurately identify students at risk.

Connectivity to Business Intelligence

While there is a significant amount of data housed and captured within an LMS, most institutions will have other data sources and business intelligence (BI), such as a enterprise resource planning (ERP), customer relationship management (CRM) and student information system (SIS). By blending LMS data with information from these other systems, institutions gain an entirely new picture of student risk. For instance, a student may be performing poorly in a course, has not paid their tuition bill for the semester, or there has been a recent change in address. All signals that might point to a change in that person's living situation or family relationships that are creating economic, and subsequent learning pressures.

While an LMS dashboard is helpful to the instructor at the course level, integration with other BI systems also allows staff and administrators to look across departmental and course boundaries to see overarching trends surrounding at-risk students and their behaviors and make larger data set comparisons.

In Summary

At the end of the day, an academic institution's performance is measured in two ways: Its student success, and its institutional effectiveness. When an institution is able to capture more data points about its students' learning in an online or technology-enabled learning environment, it is able to more clearly draw correlations between its students and faculty's behaviors and the overall success of the institution. In short, it can identify students at risk earlier, and put proactive strategies in place to get those students the support and help they need. It opens the door to progressing learning approaches such as personalization and competency-based learning.

Many organizations seeking to implement a strategy for students at risk already have the tools at hand to make this possible. By leveraging the core capabilities of an LMS, we can effectively do more for at-risk students, equip faculty with excellent tools for intervention, and do so at scale across large student populations.

About D2L

D2L is the software leader that makes learning experiences better. The company's cloud-based platform, Brightspace, is easy to use, flexible, and smart. With Brightspace, organizations can personalize the experience for every learner to deliver real results. The company is a world leader in learning analytics: its platform predicts learner performance so that organizations can take action in real-time to keep learners on track. Brightspace is used by learners in higher education, K-12, and the enterprise sector, including the Fortune 1000. D2L has operations in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, Brazil, and Singapore.

CONTACT US

Phone:	1-519-772-0325 (Worldwide)
Toll Free:	1-888-772-0325 (North America)
	0-808-234-4235 (United Kingdom and Europe)
	0-800-452-069 (New Zealand)
	1-800-656-210 (Australia)
	0-800-891-4507 (Brazil)
Fax:	1-519-772-0324
Email:	**info@D2L.com**
Twitter:	@D2L
Web:	**www.D2L.com**