

Data Makes “Dreams” Come True at Central Piedmont Community College.

“For CPCC, it is all about making data-driven decisions. And using that data to take actions. It has definitely become part of our culture and a springboard for the way we do business.”

CLINT MCELROY
CPCC Dean of Retention Services

Students at Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) can achieve their dreams. Literally.

As a career college, the Charlotte, NC-based institution is focused on student success and workforce development, and providing programs that help people get jobs.

And they have been busy doing just that. In 2012, CPCC became one of 14 “Achieving the Dream” colleges to earn the prestigious Leader College distinction and join a group of only 66 other institutions that have reached this level. Achieving the Dream, Inc. a national nonprofit dedicated to helping community college students, cited CPCC’s increased student course completion rates from 65% to 72%, and term-to-term retention for IPEDS students from 69% in 83%, as evidence for the award.

These increases in student success are associated with:

- A new pre-placement test prep program,
- A redesigned new student orientation,
- The development of an online student orientation,
- The implementation of case management advising system,
- A change in the early withdrawal policy,
- A minority male mentoring program.

ANALYTICS IN ACTION

THE SCHOOL:

- **The school was founded in 1963**
- **70,000+ students on six campuses make it the largest community college in the North Carolina Community College System**
- **Over 258 degree, diploma, and certificate programs.**

THE CHALLENGE: :

Academic and administrative leaders on campus did not have access to the information they needed to inform decisions and improve student success, close achievement gaps, and increase retention and completion rates.

THE SOLUTION :

Blackboard Analytics enables self-service access to dashboards, reports and data exploration for CPCC leadership. As a result of better access to information, new initiatives have been implemented which contributed to improved student success - student course completion rates from 65% to 72%, and term-to-term retention for IPEDS students from 69% in 83%.

The catalyst for many of the changes has been Blackboard Analytics.

“For CPCC, it is all about making data-driven decisions. And using that data to take actions,” said Clint McElroy, CPCC Dean of Retention Services. “It has definitely become part of our culture and a springboard for the way we do business.”

Putting actionable information into the hands of campus leaders

Before analytics, assembling and understanding the data was no easy task. With six campus locations serving 70,000+ students, a large online enrollment, four-year and two-year degree programs, literacy programs, and continuing education, CPCC had its hands full understanding all the dynamics of its diverse student population.

David Kim, CPCC CIO, explained how CPCC used Blackboard Analytics to institutionalize a more strategic reporting approach. “We were challenged with people requesting ad-hoc reports, and after reviewing those reports, wanting more information and requesting even more reports. They had no easy way to test their theories. Blackboard Analytics was the only tool we looked at which was very user friendly, and also allowed users to dig deep into the data to explore “what if” scenarios, and really understand the issues in a multidimensional way.”

“Before if I wanted to look at some longitudinal data I would make a request to our institutional research area and look at separate term reports to determine the change in retention from fall to spring, for example. Now I can sit at my desk and play with ideas, see trends, and experiment in a way that I could not do before” said McElroy. “There’s no way in the world I could do this without Blackboard Analytics.”

Using analytics to improve retention

The increasing number of students attending community colleges reflects a broader reach into the general population as well as higher percentages of underprepared students for U.S. community colleges. More than two-thirds of incoming students need academic remediation, before even stepping foot on campus. And many of them—who are often the first in their families to go to college, and who must juggle work and parenting—don’t understand how to balance all those demands while studying at the college level.

Increasing success rates for first year students

Looking internally, the Strategic Planning Group at CPCC learned that first-year student success rates were low. This data spurred the creation of a new department called the First Year Experience, one of the programs recognized for helping to improve completion and retention rates.

Brad Bostian, First Year Experience Director, said, “Based on the data, our Strategic Planning Group recommended every first year student be required to take advisement and an orientation session. Students were equipped with all the info they needed to enroll efficiently and accurately. Secondly, to help students during their first year, we have created successful learning networks, tutoring, mentoring and other services we know will help them succeed.”

Has analytics helped improve student success? “It has helped us point to a lot of inefficiencies,” said Bostian. “Student behaviors that are important to understand such as enrollment patterns. Things that work or don’t work well in terms of teaching methods or course delivery. All those have been revealed through analytics.”

Targeting support for struggling groups

Historically CPCC only looked at one rolled-up view of success data. Now users can drill down and bounce a number of different scenarios against each other. Demographic information, age band, grade performance by gender, by ethnicity... and many other situational needs.

For example, using Blackboard Analytics, CPCC determined that many African American male students were struggling academically. With this information in hand, the institution was able to dig deeper into the root causes and establish a minority male mentoring program (recognized as having an impact on success rates.)

They also identified that many of their older students were also struggling. When they looked further, they found that the issue was related not to academics, but to technology. As a result, they started offering courses in a hybrid form with built-in instructional time for learning the technology.

Optimizing course utilization and breaking down barriers to completion

At the instructional level, course utilization provided another area ripe for improvement. “For our students, a big barrier to completion is that they can’t take the classes because enrollments are full,” said McElroy. “A certain percentage will become discouraged and dropout. With Blackboard we can look course by course over the years, and see which classes fill up and which courses are consistently less than full. We have taken a very informed approach; saving money by offering fewer unpopular courses and freeing up resources for more classes the students want to take.”

Working with high schools to impact recruitment

Marketing outreach has also benefited from Blackboard Analytics. “One of the pieces on our strategic planning dashboard is enrollment of students by high school,” said McElroy. By knowing which schools are increasing, staying flat, or declining, we know which principals or school counselors to work with to increase the flow of students from those schools. It’s all about changing perceptions and setting up positive outreach about our school.”

Strategic dashboards to measure outcomes and performance-based funding model KPIs

As with many states, North Carolina has been easing into a performance funding model. Effectiveness for schools like CPCC is assessed by the state on KPI’s such as retention, successful grades, gateway course completion, etc. Blackboard Analytics has given CPCC a great way to look at KPIs. The Strategic Planning Group works with the state goals and sets internal goals in terms of performance. Then they can monitor those metrics from a convenient strategic planning screen, which includes all metrics in one place.



650 Massachusetts Avenue, NW 6th Floor Washington, DC 20001 | 1.800.424.9299

Copyright © 2013. Blackboard Inc. All rights reserved. Blackboard, the Blackboard logo, Blackboard Analytics, and Behind the Blackboard are trademarks or registered trademarks of Blackboard Inc. or its subsidiaries in the United States and/or other countries.

blackboardanalytics.com