The Buenos Aires Institute of Technology (ITBA) improves its decision-making processes with Blackboard Analytics for Learn
The Buenos Aires Institute of Technology (ITBA, in Spanish) implemented Blackboard Analytics for Learn in alliance with Blackboard on October 2017. Since then, ITBA has strengthened the efficiency of the key performance indicators on the use of its digital learning environment, improved its students’ academic performance, and enhanced its instructional design and technology investment evaluation processes.

Higher Education Institutions are changing and evolving, with an increasing pressure to add value to students and differentiate themselves. However, one undeniable aspect is that the university has an ever-increasing amount of information and data: students’ records prior to admission, academic performance, financial evolution, even their consumption in university cafeterias. In this regard, Learning Analytics technology is becoming increasingly affordable and it is essential to begin to introduce these practices in institutions around the world.

Blackboard Analytics for Learn helps institutions optimize online learning environments with the goal of student success. This powerful Learning Analytics tool provides reports on what works best in the environment, in what context and for whom. Javier Apat, Chief Information Officer at ITBA, shared with us his findings and practices with this technology.

At a glance: (The Opportunity at the Glance)

Challenge: By implementing Blackboard Analytics for Learn, ITBA sought to measure the adoption of its digital learning environment based on Blackboard Learn. In this way, and supported by evidence-based practice, they could implement improvements that would benefit the teaching and learning processes in the institution.

Solution: Blackboard Analytics for Learn is a powerful analytics tool that helped ITBA use already-available information in the Blackboard Learn LMS. The purpose of this is to generate informed decisions that have an impact on teaching practices, student learning, and decision-making by institution directors.

Results: Using Analytics for Learn, ITBA managers are making decisions based on a set of indicators (KPIs) set by the institution with the objective of continuous improvement in their teachers’ and students’ performance.

Challenge: The Road to Technology Adoption Assessment

ITBA implemented Blackboard Learn in 2016 and since then had the goal to achieve advanced adoption of this software in its courses. This meant that they needed their teachers to use the potential of the LMS and its multiple tools to really improve their teaching and learning processes. But how to measure adoption? That’s when Blackboard Analytics for Learn became the solution ITBA was looking for.
In addition, one of the main objectives was that the implementation of A4L should not be an isolated effort made exclusively to obtain metrics from the LMS, but that it should be part of an integral process and align to the university’s information management strategy.

Therefore, the Analytics for Learn project involved the extraction of information from other data sources such as ERP and SIS. All these initiatives were generated because decision-making based on quality information was key for ITBA.

Solution: Evidence-based decision-making

The implementation of Blackboard Analytics for Learn was an inclusive project involving the entire University, as it was imperative to make the solution available to all of the Institution’s internal groups in order to better capitalize on its benefits.

The most notable benefits of Analytics for Learn can be put into three groups: teachers, students and management teams.

For teachers:

- They obtain quick and relevant information that allows them to keep their students on track for success.
- Increases technology adoption as, thanks to the usage reports, the university can make decisions that impact the adoption rate and the resources used by teachers.

For students:

- Receiving reports on their activity and performance makes students increase their commitment to the course, which has a positive impact on academic results.
- Students have access to information on their performance comparable to their peers. This promotes self-reflective learning.

For management teams:

- Provides ease of use and access to learning data from an institutional perspective.
- Provides accurate information on user activity, course design and academic performance.

“Nowadays, all industries make decisions based on concrete information, to do otherwise would be like piloting a plane without instruments.”

– Javier Apat, Chief Information Officer (CIO), ITBA.
Results: Evaluating KPIs

ITBA began using Analytics for Learn in 2017 to prove or disprove some beliefs they had at the University. “For example, in the past, if we received student complaints on a subject’s difficulty, the first reaction was to ask teachers what was going on, which they usually responded saying that students simply did not study enough. With indicators the situation changed, and we saw how the subject evolved over the last 5 years, if there were changes in the trend, compared with other subjects, reviewed the graduation rate, analyzed the student-teacher interaction in Blackboard Learn, check what tools were used and more. All that information serves as a basis to make changes that improved students and teachers’ performance,” said Javier Apat.

Among the results obtained so far, it is noteworthy that they established different information levels, thus ensuring that each member of the community had access to indicators relevant to their role. “Many times, these type of projects do not consider the students’ needs; we found it very interesting to include them and to get reports to see how they fared in comparison with the rest,” concludes the CIO.

However, the use of Blackboard Analytics for Learn has promoted a major cultural shift. When it is necessary to make a decision that affects the entire academic community, ITBA directors analyze the indicators and evaluate what the correct path should be. Once the evidence-based decision is made, it is communicated to the University’s interest groups (professors, students, administrative staff).

Conclusion:

In today’s changing environment, universities need to provide added value that not only increases enrollment, retention and graduation rates, but also generates a differentiating value in the market. Using analytical technologies such as Blackboard Analytics for Learn not only gives institutions the power to make evidence-based decisions, but also commits their teachers to continuous improvement in their pedagogical practices and their students to self-reflective learning, which is essential to achieve success.

For ITBA, the next step is to delve into predictive analytics in order to predict a student’s performance in a given course and thus be able to act preventatively and pro-actively to improve their performance while, at the same time, make them feel engaged with the institution.

“The analytics project that we carried out at ITBA was not a standard project for Blackboard, since we wanted to use the Tableau tool as a dashboard viewer and we knew that Blackboard used Pyramid; however, they were always open to help us. This flexibility, which is sometimes rare, was something we highly valued and contributed to the project’s success. Because of that, we want to sincerely thank the Blackboard team for understanding our situation.”

– Javier Apat, Chief Information Officer (CIO), ITBA.