Analytics at Valdosta State University

Brian Haugabrook, Chief Information Officer

www.ChangeWithAnalytics.com

1. Why did your institution start using analytics?

Improving student retention, progression, and graduation was the initial goal that prompted us to use analytics at Valdosta State University (VSU). We realized we could not understand individual student needs with the standard descriptive statistics reports.

We needed a platform that allowed us to drill down and view analytics that identified barriers overall and for an individual. Analytics was also needed in the hands of advisors and faculty as they see students daily. Giving them access to informative data provided the greatest benefit for pursuing an analytics environment and pursuit of a data-informed culture at VSU.

2. How has using analytics impacted your institution?

Analytics has helped to enable more data-informed decision-making. By using powerful business intelligence tools, analytics has revealed new priorities, such as student engagement, that have now become strategic priorities.

Overall, analytics helps us become more efficient and proactive with improving student success. Analytics has also revealed new opportunities and helps ensure we prioritize our efforts better.

3.Considering the principle "Go big—Make an institutional commitment to analytics," how does Valdosta State University's story show the importance of having leadership commitment?

To be successful at using analytics, the institution's executive team must be in alignment and support the initiative. VSU has a great leadership team that embraces using data strategically to help solve problems and be informed. Our team also sets measurable strategic goals that incorporate both a quantitative and qualitative approach.

Part of the commitment is frequently reviewing progress and ensuring timelines are being met as planned. We have developed dashboards that provide daily updates on our progress for both academic and operational goals.

When you establish a culture of using analytics, data is then used strategically across all aspects of running an institution. We continually expand our analytics environments to incorporate more data from different areas.

4. What advice do you have for your colleagues at other institutions?

In moving toward an analytics culture, some points to remember as you begin:

- The success in establishing a data-informed culture is about the people, not the technology.

- Often, you will find that there is a need to capture more data, such as event attendance.

- Find a technology platform that can help get a quick win but also grow with you along the journey.

- Identify operational data that can provide a cost savings to the institution without impacting services. This will be attractive to any executive and further build the momentum and support.

- Do not be afraid of failure.

5 Steps to Begin Your Analytics Journey

The primary focus should be to start small and identify a strategic goal that can be quickly incorporated into your analytics environment. Also:

1. Start small; identify a strategic goal and gather baseline analytics to establish a timeline and appropriate milestones.

2. Ensure the executive leadership team is in support of the initiative.

3. Include faculty, staff, Institutional Research, and Information Technology from the beginning.

4. Celebrate the small victories and milestones. This is a long journey and celebrating milestones will help further build the momentum until a culture of leveraging analytics is established.

5. Meet periodically with governance groups, deans' council, department head council, and student government. Their support is important and including them in the conversation will usually result in additional ideas that can have a major impact.