

WP3 – Data for Student Success: Why ‘Student Success Analytics’?

Prepared by the ‘Data for Student Success’ Work Package. May 2022.

Up to now: Learning Analytics

“We will, within the limits of data protection legislation and principles, consolidate the range of student data collected by the University, and use appropriate data analytics to identify and support students at risk.” – MU Strategic Plan, 2018-22

“Learning Analytics is the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for purposes of understanding and optimising learning and the environments in which it occurs.” – SOLAR, 2011

“Learning analytics promises to enhance learning and teaching by providing insights into learning engagement and progression, thereby informing teaching and learning decisions.” – EU SHEILA Research Report, 2018

“Learning Analytics refers to the use of student data to understand and enhance teaching and learning with a view to optimising student success.” – National Forum, 2017

Course assessment and evaluation was one key area in the pre-digital era in which student data was collected to evaluate and improve teaching and learning. It was the advent of online learning methods and learning management systems, such as Moodle, in the 1990’s that provided a convenient method for collecting and recording large amount of data about a student’s learning experience. Initially referred to as ‘educational data mining’, this practice became termed ‘learning analytics’ as it evolved through the early part of this century.

Definitions of learning analytics have varied over the years, but there is a general understanding that learning analytics is the process through which data about a student’s learning behaviour and experience is gathered and analysed to improve understanding, target interventions, and affect positive outcomes.

The future: Student Success Analytics

“Student success optimises the learning and development opportunities for each student to recognise and fulfil their potential to contribute to, and flourish in society.” – National Forum, 2021

“Student success analytics at Maynooth University refers to the use of student data to understand and enhance supportive practices and decision making related to student success.” – MU Student Success Analytics Principles (DRAFT), 2022

Recent research indicates the focus of analysing student data can work beyond improving pedagogical goals to informing a more holistic approach to student retention and support, something which compliments student success in looking to improve the students experience both inside and outside the lecture hall. This is reflected in the recent University objective that appropriate data analytics to identify and support students at risk

Currently, many institutions are expanding their definition of student success to include areas such as extra-curricular activity, skills development, employability, and career success. This is outlined in Maynooth University's own understanding of student success, which values personal development alongside learning development. The value of the student experience outside the curriculum is also evidenced in our experiential learning, clubs and societies, and careers and skills areas. The idea that educational-based data could only inform part of a student's story was also something that emerged strongly in our consultation with staff and students at Maynooth.

The capacity to use reliable indicators that highlight, in a timely manner, where issues for students, including for specific cohorts of students (underrepresented groups etc.), are arising and for tracking change over time, is important as a means for the University to identify and share knowledge on effective initiatives, to identify where remedial action or interventions may be required, and to assist it in making informed decisions and to allocate resources in a more efficient manner during each stage of the student lifecycle.

As technology develops and different areas of the student experience can be brought together and analysed we are entering a time where student success analytics can take into account students' individual interests, values, skills, and academic achievement to provide insights to help that student achieve success at Maynooth. This holistic approach to using student data to enhance student success can allow Maynooth to merge the power of best theory and practice in student success with the best data and predictive models, resulting in the best support services delivered in a timely manner.