Georgia State University

Course Scheduling for Demand and Progression

Problem. Prior to the planning process made possible by the APLU/USU Transformational Planning Grant, course scheduling at Georgia State University was largely based on faculty preference. What this meant was that a disproportionate number of courses were taught during the middle of the day and often on topics that did not fully address the students' progression needs. As a consequence, there was not always sufficient campus classroom space to offer the number of courses requested during peak times and there was insufficient capacity in required courses to meet student demand. Scheduling of prerequisite and sequential courses around faculty leaves and availability also served to delay student progression in many cases.

Innovation. Research into alternate course scheduling models and the use of predictive analytics to anticipate course demand represent important shifts in Georgia State University's course scheduling philosophy, away from faculty-centric practices and toward a policy that balances faculty preferences with other important factors like room availability, student demand, and academic program requirements. As the new model is implemented, which consists of a new policy framework and a data-driven approach to managing course scheduling, Georgia State University expects to see improvements in its rates of student progression, along with a resulting decrease in average cost per degree and an increase in student satisfaction. Driven by faculty preferences, classroom space has traditionally been underutilized on Fridays and over-booked mid-week. By optimizing scheduling practices, Georgia State University also expects to see cost savings through a more efficient use of classroom space, increased availability of space for other campus functions and events during the week, and increased choice for working students through a more evenly distributed approach to class scheduling across the entire clock schedule.

Mitigating Financial Risks to Student Retention

Problem. Financial barriers to student retention range from tuition and fees to non-academic costs like housing, meals, books and other expenses. Facing multi-faceted financial pressures, students are often unable to meet their overall financial obligations and to persist despite making otherwise good academic progress. The APLU/USU Transformational Planning Grant allowed Georgia State University to bolster its existing predictive analytics to include financial factors that may indicate retention risk. In partnership with EAB, Georgia State University launched a data project designed to gather data on academic and non-academic financial risks to student retention. The Mitigating Financial Risks to Student Retention Working Group developed a list of financial risk factors that up to this point had not been systematically considered in gauging a student's financial situation. These factors include the costs of housing and meal plans that the student selects, applying for financial aid late, late payment patterns, slow submission of verification documents, payment method, proximity to Pell eligibility limit, proximity to loan limit, failure to make satisfactory academic progress, level of unmet need, attendance at a high number of collegiate institutions, and other factors.

Innovation. By utilizing these risk factors, Georgia State staff are implementing a series of new proactive interventions to address student financial challenges before they result in students stopping and dropping out. We are introducing new financial literacy training in an effort to reduce the number of decisions that freshmen and sophomores make that have significant negative consequences in the later stages of their studies. Our Panther Retention Grants have been very successful in mitigating some of these consequences in a reactive fashion. The use of financial analytics will continue this progress insofar as it permits the university to be more systematic and more proactive in addressing the financial challenges faced by our students. A new Student Financial Management Center, which is scheduled to open in 2016, will provide specialized one-on-one student support as well as a series of proactive outreach programs, many of which will utilize the new financial analytics. By identifying at-risk behaviors and by requiring financial counseling, Georgia State University expects to see (1) increased persistence and graduation rates, (2) decreased degree costs, and (3) decreased institutional expenditure on late-degree financial aid. An important added benefit of identifying risky financial behavior and increasing financial literacy will be an increased ability of students to succeed after graduation, since student will carry less debt and the financial literacy gained in college will enhance the life skills that are important to maintaining long-term financial stability more generally.