McLennan Community College: Taking Risks with Data

"ZogoTech really speaks our language and they really want colleges to use data for decision-making. I didn't hear that from the others. It isn't just the relationship, but the understanding of the limitations of Datatel and what their software can do to overcome those limitations and effect decision-making."

– Paul Illich, PhD, Chief Information Officer, McLennan Community College

Challenge

McLennan Community College had a hunch. While enrollment of online courses had almost doubled in two years, the attrition rate was 10 to 15 percent higher than face-to-face courses. The administrators were ready to invest significant dollars for an intervention program that would slow the online attrition rate. While MCC was used to making decisions based on research, it would take a great deal of time and effort to research the historical patterns of both online and classroom patterns to determine the right approach. MCC had the data but needed a fast and accurate way to access and view that information in order to make decisions.

Situation

"Colleges are run like businesses and need data to support key decisions," says Paul Illich, PhD, Vice President of Research, Planning, and Information Technology. "State appropriations are about 30 percent of our revenues so we look for growth opportunities—courses that have a high realization rate."

For Illich and his team, enrollment analysis was a week-long process that started with hiring programmers to pull the information out of Colleague, the college's ERP, to use for trend analysis and other kinds of studies. "We would migrate the data from Datatel and then spend all our time cleaning it up," explains Illich. "We didn't really have a program to restructure the data with sensible tools to clean it up." Data came from multiple sources on campus and it was difficult and time consuming to verify the quality of that information.

Solution

MCC chose ZogoTech to provide a data warehousing and business intelligence solution to manage student contact and information, and allow users to create their own ad-hoc queries and reports in a secure, central location. "ZogoTech was the only one that specifically migrated the fields and understood the data we work with every day in our Datatel system," explains Illich.

Using ZogoTech has enabled administrators and decision makers to easily access data, meaning that Illich and his team can spend less time gathering and cleaning data and more time on analysis.

"Analysis starts with data– and in this case – data pulled from ZogoTech," explains Illich. "I like to have it more automated so I can spend more time understanding analyses and determine trends."

The ability to run and distribute reports to various administrators beyond his department has also produced significant results.

"There is a long-term strategic benefit to having department chairs access data directly," says Illich. "Every time you do that, you're getting people to use data to make smart decisions and that mindset spreads."

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Results

Now it only takes 30 minutes, not an entire day, to get accurate, reliable data. College administrators have time, not only to get the data, but also to analyze and structure information to be used for crucial decision-making. Using ZogoTech, MCC was able to conduct research to identify the driving factors behind its enrollment growth and determined what needed to be addressed in order to maintain a growth momentum.

"ZogoTech is the type of product that can make things like enrollment growth happen more easily," says Illich. "Using ZogoTech is a quick way of getting data to the admissions directors tomorrow so that they can identify opportunities and make sure schedules are maximized."

And remember the hunch? Based on data that was pulled within 30 minutes, it was determined that the attrition issues related to Internet courses were not based on a student type or student group; it was most likely other factors, such as the length of the course. This saved the college from spending unnecessary dollars on an intervention program.

The mindset among MCC administrators has shifted. The emphasis is now on applied research where data supports decision-making. By all accounts, ZogoTech has made it easier to support the models in place and determine profit and loss by program.

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And, as the administrators at MCC discovered, by using valid, reliable methodologies to collect and analyze data, the inherent risk in taking action or holding back based on the results is minimized.