Customer Story

Canadore College Utilizes Informer Dashboards for Increased Data Transparency

Conversation with Terry Thomason, Institutional Research and Strategic Analyst, Canadore College

Pain points

- Inability to filter large data to uncover pertinent insights and promote collaboration
- Canadore's school data for program reviews was not available for end-users to view in a digestible format
- Unable to effectively determine which students needed academic intervention before it was too late

Results

- Data culture is shifting at the college; end-users better understand what questions to ask and what tools are being used to inform decisions
- Increased data transparency and accuracy through raw, understandable visuals
- Real-time data has made student retention efforts easier and has provided a clearer picture of who needs assistance

Canadore College Customer Story

Challenge

Canadore College in North Bay, Ontario, Canada is a public college of applied arts and technology. The school offers over 65 full-time post-secondary programs to 3,500 domestic students, most of whom come from outside of Canadore's catchment area, a geographical area within the college's district. Terry Thomason is the Institutional Research and Strategic Analyst for the school.

In Canada, all public institutions are run by the provincial government. The government conducts their own surveys on students and collects data on subjects such as performance and comparisons between schools in the same provinces. Ontario has 24 colleges and a population of 13 million. The information gathered is compiled into spreadsheets that can exceed 100,000 rows. Thomason did not have a way to easily break up the data to make it understandable and usable for faculty and staff at his school and needed to filter it so that they would only see pertinent information.

Thomason also needed a way to present Canadore's own school data. Program reviews occur in three-year cycles at Canadore and are comprised of three parts including application information, key performance indicators (KPIs), and academic performance of students. It was crucial that this data become available in a digestible format and be compatible with Ellucian Banner.

Solution

With the implementation of Informer Dashboards, Canadore has found an effective solution for visualizing their data. Thomason noted, "Dashboards make the data accessible." One task that Canadore is using Dashboards for are their three-part program reviews.

For the application information portion, Dashboards display data such as the number of

applications received over time, confirmations (how many students have accepted their offers), total enrollment, application market share compared to similarly sized schools, international data, funding status, demographics data, and more. In Ontario, students can apply to five colleges within one application, ranking them by preference. Canadore sees this data in a Dashboard that shows their applications by program choice number, converting 75% of first-choice applicants to full-time registered students. The school tracks attrition rate, reviewing if students have switched programs or left the school altogether. They also track applications by school board (district/county), drilling down into high schools and students' program interests. It is essential for recruiters to know which programs high schoolers are interested in, and what messages resonate with them.

With respect to the key performance indicators section of the program reviews, Dashboards demonstrate how Canadore's colleges are performing compared to the rest of the province. This is determined based on metrics such as graduation rates, number of graduates by year, and number of students that make it from the application to the graduation stage. The academic performance portion of program reviews is determined by metrics like probation and withdrawals. Thomason can drill down into this Dashboard to see more detailed information such as which program these students belong to and their grades. He focuses on unsuccessful grades, looking for what courses are being failed the most by students.

Canadore also utilizes an enrollment Dashboard that updates every morning. This displays who has withdrawn from school, enrollment by program, and residency statistics. This Dashboard is useful for financial purposes as the government does not pay for tuition until students make it to a certain date in the semester, that date being November 1st in the fall and March 1st in the spring.

On Dashboards, Thomason commented, "We use this tool every day." Canadore is also using the Teams function in Informer to inform departments on their business and tasks. Teams is a security feature that allows teams of users to have their own Datasets and related Dashboards.

Results

Informer has led to a culture change at Canadore College. According to Thomason, "Informer has changed our focus of how we look at the data." He also commented, "Dashboards are really a conversation piece. Dashboards open up the conversation to ask the questions, so you know the context behind data." Dashboards lower the barrier, putting data in the hands of all types of users. Thomason used to never hear from faculty when data was previously submitted, as people did not know what to ask. Now, Thomason says, "Informer has changed us from having a data-driven to a data-informed process."

Program review data is sent to the faculty and is much more hands-on and efficient than previously when data was evaluated via PowerPoint. "We've always had this data... now we have it in one spot," said Thomason. Informer is making faculty much more receptive to data, as it is allowing them to not only be more involved in the decisions being made around their programs but shows them exactly why decisions are being made.

Thomason can view the data to identify students who are struggling academically. Dashboards have made this apparent, and any student with a GPA of 2.0 or lower is engaged before they get to the end point of the semester when it is too late to turn grades around. Flagged students are supported through tutoring and student services to improve retention. "It's made our retention easier by having real-time data," said Thomason.

Informer Dashboards have led to increased data transparency at Canadore. Thomason noted, "Data transparency is what we're about. Data is not something you turn your back on. You can tell any story with a spreadsheet – when you take that away and show raw data in a visual, it's really hard to change the narrative."

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