Two Initiatives That Engaged Deans in Data-Informed Decision Making

Samford University, Private Master’s University in Birmingham, AL | 5K+ students

- **Challenge:** The Samford University academic leadership team sought to engage their college leaders, particularly deans, in using data to help inform decisions.

- **Solution:** Using key analyses and metrics from their Academic Performance Solutions (APS) platform, Samford leaders jumpstarted two initiatives: one to target course completion rate improvement in gateway courses and another to strengthen the use of data in making faculty line decisions.

- **Impact:** Through increased use of data by Samford deans in just one semester, students earned 54 additional credit hours in two gateway courses compared to the previous term and college leaders efficiently allocated two faculty lines.

### Initiative #1: Supporting Faculty Line Requests and Decisions with Data

Historically at Samford, there was no standard process for filling faculty lines, resulting in a fairly haphazard approach that was not sufficiently grounded in data. After the rollout of APS, the Provost was able to direct leaders in the College of Arts and Sciences to submit their requests with the relevant metrics.

#### A Standardized Approach to Faculty Lines

Academic leaders completed a worksheet using APS data and qualitative description of need. The APS Making Data-Informed Faculty Line Decisions How-To Guide and Excel template were provided as supporting resources.

#### Sample APS Metrics Included on Worksheet:

- % of Classes with Size < 10
- 3 Year Growth Rate in Course Offerings
- Instructional Staff Headcount
- Median Section Fill Rate
- Total Attempted Student Credit Hour (SCH)
- Trends in Section Consolidation Opportunities

#### Dean and Associate Dean grounded requests in APS data

For the first time, leaders knew exactly which data to include in their requests and easily found the required metrics in the APS platform. They submitted two requests to replace an existing faculty line in the Biology Department and the Chemistry Department.

#### Both faculty lines were approved given the proven need

Data supported the need for two faculty lines in the Biology and Chemistry Departments, demonstrating that each department was approaching or at capacity and could not reallocate existing resources.

### Plans to Expand to 10 Colleges and the University Library in 2019

- **Enhanced Efficiency:** Decreased reliance on Office of Institutional Research and Analytics (OIRA) to provide data to support requests allows leaders to reallocate time to other priority areas

- **Data Transparency:** Department leaders have access to the same data as university leaders and are able to understand context behind faculty line decisions
Initiative #2: Using APS to Identify High-Impact Courses on Student Outcomes

The Samford team and their APS dedicated consultant used APS course completion analyses to identify areas of opportunity with a large impact on student success. They then drew strategies from EAB’s Course Completion Playbook to guide their improvement efforts.

Prioritized Two Gateway Courses

Analysis of 2016-17 AY data revealed that Fundamentals of Chemistry and Pre-Calculus were the courses with the largest opportunities to inflect positive change in student outcomes.

- Greatest opportunity for improvement
  - 982 Attempted student credit hours in these two courses were not earned
  - 28% DFW rate, among the highest across the entire university

- Significant section-level variation in course completion rates
  - 31% Range in section variation for Pre-Calculus
  - 7 percentage points above the 24-point average range across the APS collaborative

Activated EAB Research with APS Metrics

After all deans received APS platform training from Samford’s APS dedicated consultant, they spearheaded improvements in the Mathematics and Chemistry departments.

Implemented EAB Best Practice Strategies

- Reallocated instructors who had low section completion rates to other initiatives, as well as made existing online resources available to students
- Introduced new academic resources to support students, including new supplemental instruction and more tutoring through the Academic Success Center
- Ran communications campaigns in EAB’s Student Success Management System, Navigate, to ensure enrolled students were aware of resources

Improved Student Outcomes After One Semester

After only one semester, course completion rates in the two gateway courses increased by 11.5% in the Spring 2017-18 Term.

54 Additional Attempted Student Credit Hours Earned

- Pre-Calculus: 3.9 percentage point increase in Pre-Calculus
- Fundamentals of Chemistry: 7.6 percentage point increase in Fundamentals of Chemistry

“Because we weren’t using data effectively, unless a department took it upon themselves to do DFW analysis, that wasn’t being done. But once we had a more holistic view of things with APS data, we could prompt departments to start doing that.”

Nancy Biggio, Associate Provost for Administration
SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

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1) n=43; AY 2016; includes all courses with five or more sections