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Strategic Research Questions Four-Year Colleges and Universities Could Answer with Better Data

Data supports you in making informed decisions at your college or university. Use the strategic research questions below to work toward continuous improvement, uncover student barriers, and guide your institution's data strategy.

Who should be asking the question: Cabinet Level Manager Level

GROW ENROLLMENT AND REVENUE

- Where are new students most likely to fall out of the enrollment funnel?
- How long does it take a new student to move between each enrollment step?
- Which zip codes do most of our students come from?
- What high schools are our new students coming from?
- Is there a correlation between test-optional admissions and retention?
- Do students who took Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses have higher retention rates?
- Which marketing campaigns are driving the greatest prospective student engagement?
- Which programs receive the most inquiries and applications?
- What programs yield the highest enrollment?
- How many students are transferring out? How many students are transferring in?
- How have retention rates for first-generation students changed over time?
- How many stop-out students re-enroll?
- Which strategies yield the highest re-enrollment of stop-out students?
- Which demographic(s) of students are underrepresented?
- What percentage of our Pell-eligible students receive awards annually?
- What is the average amount of a Pell grant award?
- Do tuition waivers correlate with higher enrollment rates?

ENCOURAGE ACADEMIC PROGRESS

- How do early alerts impact student persistence?
- Which courses have the highest pass rates?
- Which courses have the highest D/F/W rates?
- Are students who are D/F/W in general education and pre-requisite courses seeking out tutoring?
- Do students who use academic advising persist at higher rates?
- Does tutoring correlate with higher course rates and higher GPAs?
- Which majors have the lowest GPAs?
- Which majors have the highest retention?
- Which programs yield the most transfers?
- What are the common reasons students withdraw from courses before the census date?
- Are there differences between online and in-person course pass rates?
- Is there a correlation between LMS login frequency and course pass rates?
- What are the characteristics of students who are logging into the LMS the least?
- Are LMS utilization and engagement growing over time?
- In which courses are students most likely to complete their assignments?
- Is there a correlation of course pass rates and when students are submitting their assignments?
- Is course availability meeting student need?
- Which courses are under-enrolled?
- How long have under-enrolled courses trended that direction?
- What is the course fill rate for the institution?
- Which general education courses enroll the most and fewest students?
- How many students who expressed financial need applied for tuition waivers?
- How many students who applied for tuition waivers received tuition waivers?
- Has the FAFSA completion rate changed over time?
- Is there a correlation between students who are late on payments and retention?
- What is the average account balance of students who have stopped out of college?

UNDERSTAND THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

- How many stop-out students are more than halfway done with their program?
- Which majors have the highest stop-out rates?
- What are the most common holds stopped-out students have on their accounts?
- How many students have at least one hold preventing registration?
- How many students have financial aid on file but are not registered for the next semester?
- How many students are close to earning a degree but near a maximum credit threshold after which they won't be eligible for financial aid?
- Are more students requesting emergency aid or gap scholarships?
- Has the number of students requesting basic needs and mental health support changed?
- Is there a specific time of year when requests for mental health, basic needs, or financial supports increase?
- Are students who receive support from supplemental sources, such as TRIO or Veterans Services, having improved outcomes?
- Are there predictors of which students might face barriers to satisfactory academic progress?
- Do students who opt in to student success courses have higher retention rates?
- Is our honors program attracting and retaining students?
- Which social and cultural events are best attended?
- What is the average wait time to schedule an advising appointment?
- To what degree are students using virtual services, such as online advising or online career services?
- On average, how many credits have students earned when they make their first career services appointment?
- What are the characteristics of students who are utilizing academic, career, and/or advising services the most?
- What are the primary reasons why academically stable students are leaving the institution?
- What percentage of students are enrolled part-time?
- What is the usage rate of campus technologies and tools?
- Are we meeting students' expectations for AI use and exploration?
- Is on-campus housing meeting student need?
- To what degree are housing strategies influencing student experience?
- Which buildings are students accessing the most and least?
- Which dining options are students the most and least satisfied with?
- Which programs result in students earning the highest wages?
- Do students who participate in internships have better job placement rates?
- What are our job placement rates?
- Which businesses and industries are growing in our state?
- Which employers are most frequently hiring our graduates?

FOSTER FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

- How many non-major students are enrolled in each program's courses?
- What is the ratio of major-declared students to faculty in each program?
- Which classrooms are used the least?
- How do this year's revenue and expenses compare to those of last year?
- What is the breakdown of costs by financial fund, function, cost center, and account?
- Are we hitting our fundraising targets?
- Have our major gifts contributions changed over time?
- Which alumni engagement strategies are effective?
- What is our average alumni giving rate?
- When we apply for grants, how often are we successful?

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