Cal Maritime Charts New Course with Data-Driven Enrollment Management

NATIONAL RANKING SHINES SPOTLIGHT ON CAL MARITIME

California Maritime Academy is a small coastal campus with a big time reputation. Its unique character as a uniformed student body focused on all aspects of maritime affairs and transportation, has not gone unnoticed. In 2013, US News & World Report ranked Cal Maritime #2 in the West for regional colleges offering undergraduate degrees. Forbes Magazine ranked it #24 for Best Value nationally.

Being in the spotlight added an extra "data" burden on Cal Maritime administrators. External requesters like US News & World Report, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Princeton Review, American Society for Engineering Education, and ABET Accreditation, all needed accurate data to validate their rankings and surveys. Additionally, the imperatives of being a member of the California State University System (CSU) required the Academy to follow newly-established reporting requirements on retention and enrollment projections.

Unfortunately, there was no established best practice for collecting this data. Until recently, the Office of the Registrar used what limited IR and IT resources it had to creatively – and manually – retrieve stage and then report its data to these entities.

"Who 'owns' the data? What is our headcount today? The numbers kept changing depending on who you asked," said Cal Maritime Registrar Evelyn Andrews, who was brought in to establish best practices for data reporting. "Enrollment data was a snapshot in time, with no history to benchmark it against," she said.

Improving Graduation Rates for Underrepresented Students.

Early in 2011 Cal Maritime partnered with Blackboard Analytics to help the campus shift the course of its student recruitment, enrollment management and retention efforts in a more favorable direction. Within three months, integration between PeopleSoft (CSU's Student Information System) and Blackboard Analytics (Student Management module) was ready for validation. By fall 2011, CMS had built shadow reports verifying the accuracy of the data.

"I was able to learn Blackboard Analytics fairly quickly and work with the provost to report accurate data to the chancellor's office", said Andrews. "It's easy to use, and the visual presentation of the data helped me tremendously. We now have information that this campus has never seen before. Overall, it has given us much more insight into our population and our core spaces."

One of the school's first goals was to monitor and improve the graduation rates for underrepresented students. This goal was driven in part by the CSU initiative for improving graduation rates; and part by the internal goal to improve the campus experience for students.

Blackboard Analytics helped Andrews and her team to easily identify key success metrics of underrepresented students, by gender, major, cohort and attrition rates.

"Blackboard confirmed our suspicions that we needed to do a lot of work to retain these underrepresented groups," said Andrews. "It also informed administration that we needed to increase the level of underrepresented faculty and support staff to match the incoming student demographics."

Academic Data Helps Improve the Classroom

Additional insights were gained from looking at academic data. "Our president walked around campus and wondered why we had so many empty classrooms during certain times," said Andrews. "We analyzed our class utilization percentages and learned that our large population of engineering students were mostly taking courses in labs, not lecture classrooms." This data was useful to facilities management as they scheduled classrooms or looked at projections for new building construction.

Analysis of "bottleneck" courses provided similar findings. Bottlenecked or overenrolled courses were making it hard for students in certain disciplines to reach graduation on time. Analytics data was used to refine policy/add more sessions or faculty for these popular classes, helping to alleviate these obstacles.

ANALYTICS IN ACTION

THE SCHOOL:
- CMA Founded in 1929. Campus on San Francisco Bay
- Approximately 970 Cadets
- Degrees in international business & logistics, marine engineering technology, global studies & maritime affairs, marine transportation, mechanical engineering, and facilities engineering technology.

THE CHALLENGE:
- External reporting requirements related to retention and enrollment projections; internal reporting requirements to improve enrollment management and student outcomes

THE SOLUTION:
- Blackboard Analytics has become an integral part of an ongoing and cross-functional strategic enrollment management initiative to improve student success with analytics as the foundation for decision making.

Institutionalizing Strategic Enrollment Management

The success of Blackboard Analytics has helped institutionalize analytics at Cal Maritime, and provided a catalyst for development of a Strategic Enrollment Plan. "We've just established a Strategic Enrollment Management committee comprised of the registrar, director of admissions, director of financial aid, AVP of finance, and the provost, where we will further define our data needs using Blackboard Analytics to inform and plan around growth with enrollment, faculty/staff, and facilities," said Andrews. "We also have plans to roll out a dashboard to the academic deans and department chairs to plan and project course demand."

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