Building a Culture of Data

University of North Carolina System
and HelioCampus

In 2017, the University of North Carolina (UNC) System, with more than 230,000 students and 60,000 employees at the time, partnered with HelioCampus to create UNC Insight, a modern data-sharing platform connecting all of their institutions across the state. When the project began, the team was most excited about the centralized data warehouse, called the Student Data Mart, and the easy-to-use dashboards and data visualizations that HelioCampus developed to turn a wealth of data into meaningful information. In a system with 17 institutions, all with unique needs and demographics, each campus had built its own processes for accessing and using data over time. Maximizing the full potential of the Student Data Mart required a reliable, secure, yet accessible approach to data-sharing.

"We didn't just want to build a data warehouse," says Laura Bageant, then AVP of Data and Analytics at the UNC System Office, **"we wanted to build a data culture."** To make that happen, the UNC System team didn't only invest in the UNC Insight platform, they also invested in the people required to support the new system. At the center of the human investment was a multi-functional team supporting the data ecosystem and its entire lifecycle, including requirements gathering, planning and governance, architecture, data pipeline and visualization development, and support and evangelization. Under this new approach, informing and engaging stakeholders at all levels and all phases of the lifecycle became a centerpiece of the growth and development of UNC analytics.

Building Community by Learning Together

As part of the effort to build a data culture, the UNC System team recognized they could tap into the wealth of expertise and experience among the universities' teams. Information Product Manager Peter Spung joined the team to continue increasing analytic capacity system-wide by engaging 17 campuses and the System Office in varying stages of the analytics journey.

Spung knew that building a system-wide learning community required getting people together to share knowledge. When it comes to using data to inform decision-making, "there really are a set of best practices," says Spung. "And we wanted spaces that would make it easy to share those best practices and learn from one another." Routine calls and campus visits were used to catalyze that effort, and experts from HelioCampus and across the UNC system were invited to share or learn more about the platform.
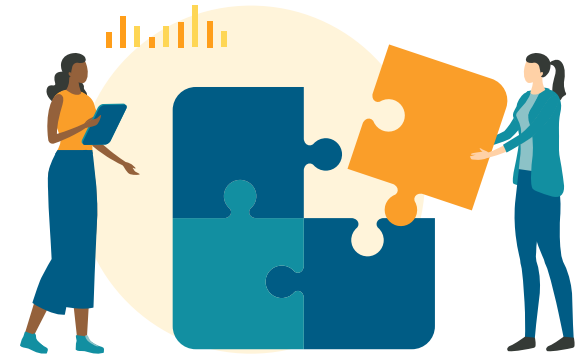
During their monthly meetings, leaders from the different UNC institutions share new use cases and learn more about upcoming initiatives from the System Office. They can also ask for support from HelioCampus and brainstorm potential projects based on current capabilities. Starting in 2019, both the UNC Insight team and the HelioCampus team embarked on semi-annual campus visits to discuss each institution's unique data analytics maturity journey, to discover best practices to share with the broader community, and to bolster support for the capability maturity journey each institution is undertaking with analytics at their own pace. This open dialogue, paired with the virtual visits, creates a feedback loop to inform future product enhancements.

The fact that data on the platform is not limited to census-based, external reporting has been a big attraction to stakeholders. Managerial, day-to-day data is also available and, as their projects expand, stakeholders in many operational areas have gotten involved. For example, projects involving financial data, transferring courses and credit from prior learning, and emergency preparation data have attracted staff from other departments to these meetings.

Streamlining Student Success – Across the UNC System

As UNC expands into more complex data sharing and analysis, HelioCampus has played an integral role. For example, the HelioCampus team is always on call to help the System Office and individual campuses adopt new features and assist with staff augmentation during big projects to cover gaps in staffing and keep projects moving forward.

As the relationship progressed, HelioCampus has helped UNC move from descriptive analytics into predictive models and forecasting. Over the last couple of years, HelioCampus has collaborated with institutions and the System Office on data science projects that include predictive models and forecast dashboards. One such project involved using risk scoring and student success predictive modeling to assist with identifying and intervening with students to improve retention, graduation, and course completion.

Sharing With
Stakeholders

UNC is recognized as a leader in higher education data analytics. Much of the focus has centered on stakeholders within the System and on ensuring robust, reliable data are available to those closest to it.

What's next for UNC? The team is increasing focus on public-facing data and visualizations that expand information sharing with more key stakeholders. **"We aspire to empower leaders and other stakeholders to use data in real-time, during key conversations,"** says Bageant, continually growing the value of UNC's exemplary data assets.

If you would like more information on HelioCampus solutions, email **info@heliocampus.com**.

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