Technological solutions which contribute to the engagement and retention of distributed learners

Rhonda Leece
University of New England
rleec@une.edu.au
Meet Mary

One students’ journey
UNE Context

- Regional University with diverse and dispersed student population
- E-service models for administrative, teaching and support provision

Majority of students:
- study by distance education
- 25 years or older
- Multiple and often conflicting priorities reflecting multidimensional nature of their lives.
Technology to identify ‘happiness’ and ‘wellness’

Data

Information

Action

Technology
# Two primary constructs
Measured and monitored via technological tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-reported</th>
<th>System-detected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Happiness</strong></td>
<td><strong>wellness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–noun</td>
<td>–noun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high spirits, satisfaction</td>
<td>the quality or state of being healthy in body and mind, esp. as the result of deliberate effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness is the self reported state of satisfaction with the student experience</td>
<td>Fitness for study as an actively sought goal supported by ‘good habits’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You’ve met Mary

- Australian born
- 35 years old
- Working part-time
- Childcare responsibilities
- Lives in a regional centre in eastern Australia
- Completed secondary school
- This is her first effort to undertake tertiary studies.
- First in family
- Time poor, balancing work, family, community and now study responsibilities.
Institutional socialisation

- It is unlikely that Mary will attend the Armidale campus between commencement and graduation.
- Most of Mary’s transactions with UNE will be managed online and she will communicate with staff via multiple channels.
- When she first enrolled, Mary had no understanding of the processes of applying for study, how to enrol and how to actually participate in higher education—let alone how to participate as a distributed learner.
How things are done around here

- YouTube videos created by the Student Support Team. Subject matter experts at the University present (via video) the guidance to complete most administrative processes.

- Student Success Moodle Unit—online Orientation and Transition to study.

- Social media provides the multiple channels for communication to and from the university.

Like most of the off-campus mature-aged students at times I have found uni[versity] very challenging. And I don’t like to ask for help because I always assume that ‘everyone else is coping just fine’, the problem must lie in my court. Thank you for putting this[support system] together and making 2011 one of the most promising starts that I can remember. From the Study Planner to the YouTube Diary and ASO updates plus the updates here, it’s felt a lot more like I’m part of a community, not just a number.
Informational capital

- What do I know?
- What don’t I know?
- Who can tell me what I need to know?
Student Support— in student spaces where and when they need it.

Thanks to you and the crew up there for all the posts and the vids. You guys really make us distance students feel like we are part of the uni. (student 2011)

This is fantastic. You guys have heaps of communication which I think is fantastic. I am really liking this idea. Sometimes you know you need help but what sort of help is available as an external student and first year student your(sic) not sure on. Way to go! (student 2012)
What’s on your mind today?

- Dislocation from peers can be isolating for distributed learners
- The Vibe collates feedback from students in a dynamic word-cloud
- Updates instantly (when students respond to the question ‘what’s on your mind today?’)
- Normalises the variation in feelings experienced by students
- Incredibly rich unstructured data
- Student Support Team is able to respond appropriately where issues are identified.
I love watching the vibe on myUNE (the little ball of words)...The biggest word today is 'finished' the second biggest are exam, essay, tired, behind, stresses...seems I’m not the only one swept up in catching up with all the forgotten assignments. (student 2011)

(Vibe 24/6/13)
Emoticons allow students to self report ‘happiness’
Embedded in the student portal
Every student who reports an ‘unhappy’ or ‘very unhappy’ experience is contacted within 24 hours.
Thank you for your concern and feedback. I now understand that if I am struggling that there will be someone looking out for me during the coming semesters (2009).
Close the feedback loop everytime

- The *Insider’s Guide to UNE* current student’s blog
- Provides information and advice relevant to the issues raised by students through the multiple social media tools
- *Just-in-time; Just-in-case* communication
‘Wellness’
System detected changes in behaviour

- The Automated Wellness Engine (AWE), identifies changes in students’ interactions with their studies
- Student Support staff intervene and offer support.
The AWE

[Diagram of the AWE system]

- Student Body
- Action/Behaviour
- e-Motion Auto-Response
- Priority Worklists
- Retention Team
- Automated Wellness Engine
- Triggers and Weightings
- Proactive, Informed Support/Intervention
- e-Reserve
- LMS
- SRM
- SMS
- UNE Corporate Systems
Triggers– student engagement and historical performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Indicators</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TP_MAX_PORTAL_INACTIV_PERC</td>
<td>Maximum % Portal Inactivity over the teaching period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT_ESB_SUBM_ASSIGNMENT_PERC</td>
<td>% Assignments Submitted for the Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COURSE_GPA_AT_TP_START</td>
<td>Course GPA at the start of the teaching period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOT_ESB_SUBM_ASSIGNMENT_PERC</td>
<td>% Assignments Submitted in Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT_CLASS</td>
<td>Unit Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALENDAR_TYPE</td>
<td>Calendar Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOT_ESB_ASSIGNMENT_NO</td>
<td># Assignments Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAST_TP_FAIL_INCOMPLETE_GRADES</td>
<td>Number of fail or incomplete grades in last teaching period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP_GPA_AT_TP_START</td>
<td>GPA at start of Teaching Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COURSE_RESPONSIBLE_ORG_STRUCT</td>
<td>Organisation Responsible for Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITS_ENROLLED_NO</td>
<td>Number of units enrolled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP_MAX_RESERV_INACTIV_PERC</td>
<td>Maximum % E-Reserve Inactivity over the teaching period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT_ESB_ASSIGNMENT_NO</td>
<td># Assignments for Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COURSE_TYPE_GROUP_DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>Course Type Group Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOT_ESB_ASSIGNMENT_NO</td>
<td># Assignments Submitted Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAST_TP_FAIL_GRADES</td>
<td>Number of fail grades in last teaching period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COURSE_ATTENDANCE_MODE</td>
<td>Course Attendance Mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT_LEVEL</td>
<td>Unit Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COURSE_OWNER_ORG_STRUCT_1</td>
<td>Organisation Owner of Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COURSE_TYPE_DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>Course Type Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COURSE_GPA_UNIT_NO</td>
<td># Units used to calculate course GPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITS_ENROLLED_PREVIOUSLY_NO</td>
<td># Units enrolled previously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT_OWNER_ORG_STRUCT</td>
<td>Organisation Owner of Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLLEGE_RESIDENT_IND</td>
<td>College Resident indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT_ESB_SUBM_ASSIGNMENT_NO</td>
<td># Assignments Submitted for Unit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

→ Student Engagement
→ Historical Performance
Data-driven student support

**Identify**
- Identification of the 200 most ‘at risk’ (of disengagement) students each day
- Triage each student’s situation
- Identify the immediate and longer term issues impacting on engagement

**Clarify**
- The types of issues identified through the triage include health, personal, administrative and academic concerns.

**Respond**
- Students referred to the most relevant support service for assistance
- Common issues of the day are addressed by items and tips on the Insider’s Guide to UNE, Facebook, twitter, Youtube, Flikr…

For Mary, this system means that we will contact her throughout her studies when the system detects that her circumstances are changing.
Unpacking student issues

[Pie chart with various categories and percentages]

HERDSA 2014–Leece
Dear Mary,
We are part of the Student Support Network and we thought we would email just to check in to see how things are going with your studies. We can help with all aspects of your experience at UNE and we specialise in troubleshooting all types of issues for students. Anything you tell us is 100% confidential and we can usually help you solve most problems in a couple of phone calls.

So if there's something bugging you, something you don't quite understand or there's something affecting your ability to commit to your studies please let us know so we can help! All you have to do is reply to this email or jump on the phone and call us on 02 6773 4430 (if we don't answer please leave a detailed message so we can get back to you as soon as we can). We hope that everything is OK but just to make sure, we'll follow up with another email in a week or so if we don't hear from you.

Best wishes Ed, Blake, Jacinta, Frances Rachel and Lisa - The Student Support Team

I felt so supported by your email ... I was sleeping on a hospital floor with my father in a coma and then passing away. I was there three weeks and then the funeral and autopsy stuff and assignments due. It was a semester of a blur... I think I have gone from a D and HD student to a pass student. It has been a tough semester but I thank you so much for your support (2010).
Using technology to understand student withdrawal

- How many students withdraw each day/teaching period/year?
- Who are the students?
- What are they studying?
- Why did they withdraw?
- Are they lost to the institution?

Data

Information
I just want you to know that because of your encouragement, I didn't drop out of my English unit and got a credit. Thank you for your support and words of encouragement. It was truly because of you that I persevered with it and I am so relieved I did.
Technology
Sense and Respond model of engagement and retention

Questions?
Thank you

Rhonda Leece
UNE
rleec@une.edu.au