UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI CASE STUDY

Mizzou — University of Missouri

iClicker Insights driving early intervention to support student success

Institutional Context

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI set a priority goal to increase the retention rate of new students to 93% by 2023. The executive sponsor of the project, Dr. Jim Spain, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies said, "The retention rate isn't just a number for us. We made a commitment to our students when we admitted them. The students and their families place their trust in Mizzou and we have a responsibility to honor their trust. We want to provide opportunities for each student to succeed while recognizing that the students are responsible for taking advantage of the opportunities and student success programs."

Increasing the first-year retention rate to 93% from their current level of 88% will take a variety of initiatives. The University of Missouri has begun establishing a student success network, a campus-wide early alert system, a campus-wide inclusive excellence approach to serve underrepresented and underserved students, and more. With various outreach processes already in place, the success team was looking for ways to provide high-touch care by reaching more students.

The next step Mizzou took was to coordinate a campus-wide new student success survey to understand the needs of incoming students. The divisions of Undergraduate Studies and Student Affairs came together and fostered a collaborative approach.

Challenges

Student success, and specifically retention, is a primary institutional goal of the University of Missouri's strategic plan. With the current retention at 88.4%, Mizzou leadership understands that it will take high-touch, intentional and individualized efforts to move the needle to 93%, their 2023 goal. Coupled with this is the challenge of institutionalizing high-touch efforts within a decentralized organization structure. Not only are advising efforts decentralized across the academic units, but also other non-academic areas such as financial aid, residential life and student affairs needed to be included. As a result, Mizzou needed a solution that would integrate these various support services in a holistic way to address individual student needs and concerns. To do this, the solution needed to be grounded in data that also addressed student success holistically.

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Solution

The University of Missouri worked with Macmillan Learning as an early partner on the iClicker Insights project and used the iClicker Insights retention surveys to enhance their existing student success initiatives.

SURVEYS

The iClicker Insights solution provides higher education institutions with an innovative, supplemental approach to student success. iClicker Insights contains a series of short surveys administered in the first 3 to 4 weeks of the term. The surveys cover key transition issues for new students such as institutional commitment, social integration, academic resilience, and homesickness, as well as classroom issues like attendance and course struggles. The surveys were developed by Macmillan Learning's Analytics and Research Team using 20+ years of research at 150+ institutions.

INTERNAL COLLABORATION

Collaboration at Mizzou started with leadership. Both the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies and the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs partnered with Undergraduate Deans and campus leadership to implement the survey. Under the coordination of two project managers (one from each area), a success team came together with key advocates for student success, including advising leadership from 8 academic units, residential life staff, Mizzou Online, financial aid, cashiers, health and well-being, the Center for Student Academic Success and Excellence, fraternity and sorority life, the care team, and off-campus student services.

Collaboration also occurred behind the scenes to market and implement the survey, integrate various systems to manage implementation, as well as manage and document interventions. Partners included Student Information Systems, Course Design and Technology (Canvas), early alert system (Starfish), the marketing and communications team, class instructors, residential life staff, and more.

INTERVENTIONS

The team developed clear plans for assigning outreach based on survey pathway groups (academic, financial, social, institutional, and holistic), specific groups of students, the number of issues, and the specific issues raised. The goal was to use key staff members, existing relationships, and clear plans to ensure timely responses and manageable workloads. The Mizzou Care Team worked with students who had 4 or more issues (holistic pathway). Students with fewer issues received outreach from the appropriate office to help address those targeted issues. For instance, the financial aid office and cashier's office contacted every student flagged with a financial concern. Outreach ranged from common tactics like emails, phone calls, and text messages to more rigorous efforts like intrusive scheduling and knocks on residence hall doors.

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Successes

The iClicker Insights survey has impacted the University of Missouri in multiple ways, from an individual basis of helping students succeed to affecting the institution as a whole.

AN INTERVENTION SUCCESS STORY

A residence hall coordinator met with a transfer student living in the residence halls who had identified a social issue on the survey. This student was a little older than most residence hall students, had previously served in the military, and shared that they were having a hard time finding a friend group at Mizzou as their interests and life experiences were not aligning with the students they had met so far. The hall coordinator discussed Mizzou resources as well as community resources with the student and helped them come up with creative ways to meet other students and community members to form connections with others.

BREAKING DOWN SILOS

How has the iClicker Insights survey impacted the institution as a whole? This initiative has provided an opportunity to break down silos and bring together units that often don't have a chance to interact. "I don't know of any other examples where we've all come together around a process that's intended to support students. I've learned so much from hearing different approaches from residence life, financial aid, the care team, and the academic teams," said a member of the success team.

GIVING STUDENTS A GOOD IMPRESSION OF MIZZOU

One success team advocate notes, "I don't know how many students have told me, 'well, this place might not be for me, but I now have a positive image of the institution because somebody took the time to follow up with me. When I talk to others about my experience, I will be positive about it.'" So, even if a student decides to transfer somewhere else, they still leave with a good impression of Mizzou because of the Insights survey. Another success team member noted that "Many of the students who take the survey haven't developed a relationship with an advisor yet because they're fairly new students. So it's a good way to just check in with them and show that someone cares about their academic progress."

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Results

In the first semester of implementation, the combination of iClicker Insights' analytics and retention surveys helped student advocates from across campus to better identify students in need of intervention and make a meaningful difference in their success.

The surveys identified almost 300 students in need of assistance that other early alert tools at Mizzou had not identified (the current early alert system utilizes faculty concerns). Dr. Jim Spain remarked, "I just learned that 280 students—first-time college students—have been on my campus for 4 weeks are saying 'I don't know if I'm going to be able to financially stay.'" Insights truly added more "early" into early alert. Faculty and staff across campus were able to support retention efforts for a manageable number of students that might otherwise have been missed.

The retention data suggests that at-risk students who engaged in interventions were more likely to persist than those who did not. For instance, among the students who were flagged for "sense of belonging" issues, those who engaged in interventions had a significantly higher fall-to-fall retention rate than those who did not (85% compared to 75%).

In their second year of implementation, Mizzou compared the Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 retention rates for first-time college students. In one of their most striking findings, **students with the highest increase in 2019 to 2020 retention were those flagged by the iClicker Insights survey and who participated in an intervention.** In addition, students who chose not to respond to the survey had the lowest retention rate (83%) among three other groups: students who filled out the survey with no issues identified (96%), students who had at least one issue identified by the survey and participated in an intervention (93%), and even students who had at least one issue identified by the survey and did not participate in an intervention (89%).

> **Students with the highest increase in 2019 to 2020 retention were those flagged by the iClicker Insights survey and who participated in an intervention.**

	FS2019		FS2020	
	Cohort Size	**% Retained to 2nd Year**	**Cohort Size**	**% Retained to 2nd Year**
Check-In Flag, WITH Intervention	815	90%	465	93%
Check-In Flag, NO Intervention	672	90%	976	89%
No Survey Issues	1,151	95%	1,383	96%
No Survey	2,726	87%	2,428	83%

The next step for the Mizzou team is to use these new findings to further enhance their approach to outreach while building on their past successes.

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