

CASE STUDY

Using Data Analytics to Drive Retention Strategies

HelioCampus and the University of Southern Mississippi



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

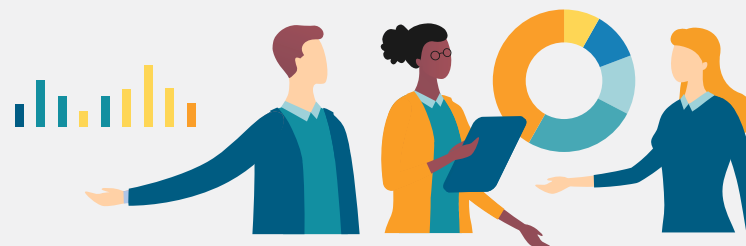
HelioCAMPUS



Located near the Gulf of Mexico, the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) is a public R1 institution serving over 10,600 undergraduate and 3,400 graduate students, both online and in-person. USM prides itself in balancing an exceptional, internationally known research profile with an emphasis on student-centered pedagogy and support. However, a perennial challenge for leadership was having ready access to accurate, shared data on student success, financial health of academic programs, and other critical metrics. Like every institution, USM needed data analytics to determine whether their tactics for driving student success and program productivity translated into tangible results.

To help drive more informed decision-making, USM partnered with HelioCampus in 2018. The partnership resulted in three powerful benefits as they transitioned to becoming a more data-informed institution.

Data-Empowered Leadership



As with many institutions, USM's Institutional Research (IR) office was small. The university also lacked the staff and resources within IT to build a data warehouse or gather the extensive analytics from across the university necessary for deeper insights. With information trapped in silos, departments would sometimes disagree about their different datasets, often leading to confusion.

HelioCampus helped by building a data warehouse and pulling disparate sources together to create dashboards that would empower leaders to manipulate and visualize data. Today, USM leaders know important details about their units, such as retention and graduation rates, and this transparent data access now provides a single source of truth across the institution. **According to Executive Vice Provost Dr. Amy Chasteen, working with HelioCampus enabled them to “pull different data sources together into one place to start creating data dashboards and visualizations that allow us to see things in a clearer way than we were ever able to see before.”** Whether discussing financial health of programs and schools, student success metrics, or other critical issues, institutional leaders are now more knowledgeable than ever before about institutional accomplishments and challenges.

Empowering Deans With Data

Every year at USM budget hearings, deans share their budget requests and make arguments for funding increases in areas of need. With access to data-fed dashboards at their fingertips, deans can now make stronger, more informed arguments based on metrics such as student credit hours, degree production, and graduation rates. This access to information has increased transparency, reduced confusion, and encouraged buy-in of academic leaders over larger financial choices.

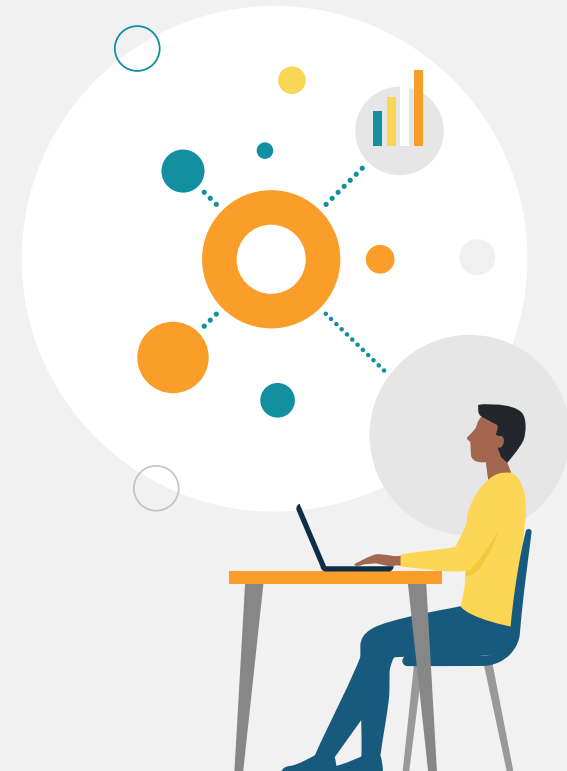
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Optimizing Academic Programming

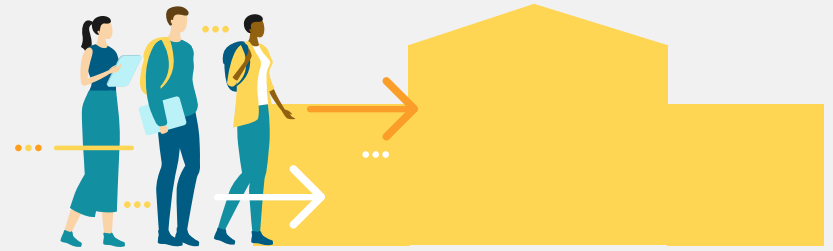
Making decisions about academic programs is a complex process for every university, with leaders from different departments advocating for investment in various programs and institutions striving to balance cost and revenue centers in the institutional profile. Leveraging the data now available through the HelioCampus platform, USM leaders were able to cut through this confusion and optimize their programming to meet the needs of students more effectively.

Data-driven programmatic improvements included:

- Creating an educational program profile for both current students and incoming students. Using data, leaders identified popular subjects that attracted students and looked for trends in what students wanted to study in the future.
- Identifying and expanding revenue centers that coincided with their mission. For example, programs with growing enrollment could receive extra faculty resources, program development, and registration optimization.
- Strategically managing cost centers, or programs that brought in little revenue but made sense for the USM mission. Using data, leadership in these departments could find ways to manage costs, such as generating external funding.
- Identifying programs that were no longer performing well, i.e., not recruiting students, producing revenue, or generating research productivity. The data encouraged making informed decisions to revitalize these programs to recruit new markets or to sunset programs, as needed.



Strategic Enrollment Management



With increased expectations from students and their families, enrollment management in higher ed is much more complicated than even five years ago. It requires responding to questions about the value of a college education, meeting the need of diverse student bodies, and delivering sophisticated online options.

Today, however, USM can leverage data to provide crucial insights to find the best ways to support students with unmet financial needs. Thanks to the HelioCampus platform and services, university leaders can more accurately target prospective students who will be successful at USM, identify current students who are struggling, and, most importantly, allocate financial resources in the most effective way possible.

As more students from low-income households enroll in higher education, for example, USM wanted to find more effective ways to reduce the financial pressure for these students. Before HelioCampus, USM did not have a mechanism to identify specific funding levels or subpopulations who would most benefit from financial awards, and the institution feared that they were spending money on students who did not necessarily need it, while struggling populations were not receiving the extra aid they needed to stay in college. Using the HelioCampus platform, leadership can now ensure aid is going where it is needed most. **“We can potentially increase the rate of retention without increasing the amount of money,” says Chasteen, “to make sure that every dollar is going to the best place that it can.”**

Using Data to Retain At-Risk Students

USM’s Office of the Provost wanted to pinpoint the dollar amount needed to help Pell-eligible students—a traditionally at-risk group—through their first and second years. With help from HelioCampus, USM was able to identify a specific dollar amount needed to increase retention rates for these students. Using that figure, they secured grant funding to award to at-risk sub-populations and coupled it with coaching and other aid. The end result? Students who received the reward had a 20% higher fall to spring retention rate over those in the same at-risk group who did not.

Building a Data Culture

While USM's partnership with HelioCampus resulted in a data platform that helps university leaders make more informed decisions, the relationship was about more than technology.

“**HelioCampus worked with us every step of the way to answer the questions we had about our data,**” explains Dr. Chasteen. **“The goal wasn't to give us pre-packaged datasets but to work with us, listen to our needs, and help us find answers to our specific questions.”** With HelioCampus's help, USM built a culture that embraces data transparency and consistency to drive decision-making, strategically allocating precious dollars where they will have the most impact.



For more information on HelioCampus Solutions, **visit www.heliocampus.com or email info@heliocampus.com**

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