



Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: Automated student engagement analytics: a short cut to transition monitoring?

Transition(s) the practice supports:

- Approaches to transitions
- Empowering students through transitions

Abstract: The current higher education climate involves substantially larger class sizes, greater student diversity and greater flexibility in curricular choice. As a result, monitoring student engagement and transition into HE or at key points within chosen programmes has become considerably more challenging. Furthermore, engagement (or lack of engagement) within chosen subject areas can be used as a predictive index of students who may be having difficulty and who are at increased risk of academic failure or leaving the University without a successful outcome. Automated procedures that facilitate large-scale monitoring are now available to make this process more manageable and efficient, and also less laborious. The author has piloted the use of such measures across various courses at the University of Aberdeen.

Description: As part of the wider field of learning analytics, automated monitoring/engagement measures can be used predictively to identify at risk students such that early intervention can be targeted to those that need it most, to help their retention, transition and progression within their degree programme. Therefore, effective engagement monitoring drives tailored and targeted support, maximising resource utilisation and sustainability, all of which are fundamentally important within the current HE business model. However, monitoring has traditionally been a manual, laborious and ineffective process and this is a major barrier to its accuracy and efficiency.

The author has experimented with the use of Blackboard's "Retention Centre" within the University of Aberdeen virtual learning environment (MyAberdeen) as a means of enhancing the efficacy of this process. The functionality allows flexible and tailored rules to be customised within course areas to alert coordinators in the event that students are failing to meet specific engagement criteria. Such parameters include last access of the virtual learning environment, adherence to deadlines, completion of selected tasks and actual grades received. The flexibility of the system allows coordinators to add identified students to a *watch list*, email them directly or take other intervention steps as necessary. The level of automation is entirely flexible, with the option to send editable automatic emails to students who don't meet the rule criteria, or perhaps when 2 parameters are not met; alternatively, only the coordinator can be

alerted, allowing a more personal approach. Indeed, the system can also be used to reinforce positive engagement (e.g. when a student achieves consistently high marks) by simple adjustment or addition of customised rules. This particular use of the system was seen as very positive by students, who suggested that this monitoring tool was fair, effective and encouraged their engagement with the course.

A variety of courses, at a variety of levels have been piloted using this automated monitoring instrument, and the specific findings of these were positive from both staff and student perspectives.

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