

Best Practices for Gathering Data and Using it to Increase Student Retention

1. **What are your goals? What outcomes do you hope to accomplish?** Be as specific as possible. Be flexible enough to adjust based on the data that you can acquire. Write these down and keep them in front of you as you work through this process.
2. **Who needs to be involved to help you reach your goals?** Generally you need people from these campus offices: Information Technology, Institutional Research, Student Services (Registrar, Admissions, Advisors), and Academic Team (Distance Learning, Deans, Faculty). You know your campus and may want to add some, or delete others, but make sure that everyone who needs information, analyzes information, will act up on the data or manages digital information is there to contribute.
3. **What data do you need to act upon to help you reach your goals? Who needs these pieces of data? When do these people need the data?** Determining data needs can be complicated because different people on your campus have different needs and interests. Here are a few tips that you might want to consider when you begin to establish priorities.
 - a. How much of the data overlaps? See if one report can meet many needs.
 - b. Give priority to the daily/weekly tasks, then as time permits expand your reporting and data collection to the information needed by term or annually.
4. **What data do you have?** An analysis of data available to you through your LMS that might be combined with information from your student information system is a good first step. Run reports, see what is there. We found that we could find the following without any special programming. As our data needs grew, so did the need for more specialized programming (and the NGLC grant).

LMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Login dates• Time spent online• Grades
SIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First time online• Comparison to enrollment and success in non-online courses

If you don't have the data already being collected in one of your two major systems, then work with appropriate people to start putting the information into the systems in a way that makes data collection meaningful.

5. **How do you get the data you need? Can data be easily and securely disseminated? Can data be shared with the right people at the right time?** This is the technical question and involves thinking through your workflows again. Can individuals run reports, or do you need to have IT, or a designated person run reports? Does all of the information needed by anyone one person come from one place, or do you need to merge information?
6. **What will you do with the data when you get it?** Workflow processes, individual and department responsibilities will need to be outlined so that your ultimate goals can be reached. This will involve establishing buy-in of the processes, acceptance of the goals and support at all levels of your institution.
7. **Did your actions have the expected outcomes? Did you meet or move closer to your overall goals?** Assess your process; analyze the data that was used to support your processes. Determine if and when changes should be made. Record changes and begin the cycle again.