

Building Data Strategies for Equity and Excellence at North Park University

Addressing Disparities in Student Retention and Graduation Rates Through Data Infrastructure and Analytics

North Park University is a private Christian university located in Chicago, Illinois. Established in 1891 by the Evangelical Covenant Church, the institution is known for its commitment to a rigorous academic curriculum grounded in the Christian faith. With a focus on fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment, North Park University seeks to prepare students not only academically but also ethically and spiritually for leadership roles in their communities.

Disparities in Student Retention and Graduation Rates

North Park University has grappled with notable disparities in student retention and graduation rates, particularly among students of color. Recognizing the urgency of this issue, senior leaders acknowledged that the institution faced a formidable challenge due to the absence of clear and comprehensive data. This gap underscored the critical need for establishing a unified data infrastructure coupled with sophisticated analytics to understand the root causes of the disparities. Compounding the challenge was the absence of a dedicated institutional research department, leading to inconsistent data collection and management practices across various departments. Addressing these multifaceted challenges became imperative for North Park University to devise effective strategies for enhancing student success and closing the achievement gap.

Improvement Project

Creating a System of Knowledge Management

Toolkit Used

Data Ecosystem Assessment
Data and Systems Governance Guide

Results

- Utilized insights gained from toolkits to strengthen data infrastructure, laying a solid foundation for data-informed decision-making.
- Successfully established a cross-functional Data Governance Council to formulate and implement policies related to data governance and management.
- Enhanced data analytics capabilities through a partnership with Trivium BI.



“We had a lot of anecdotal stories about this student or that student. But there wasn’t a lot of data that we had that would point us in the direction of why students weren’t retaining. Is it a financial issue? Is it a preparedness issue?”

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Scott Stenmark,

*Vice President for Finance and
Administration/CFO*

Building a Robust Data Infrastructure

To assess and address its data infrastructure needs, North Park University’s leadership team employed the Data Ecosystem Assessment and leveraged the Data and Systems Governance Guide. These tools provided insights into the key areas requiring attention to fortify the university’s data environment and cultivate a culture of data governance. In response to these findings, the university formally established a new Data Governance Council. Comprised of cross-functional members, this council is entrusted with the role of formulating policies related to data governance and management. Furthermore, the council’s work will echo the importance of strategic planning and budgeting to align with the university’s strategic goals.

The Need for Data Analytics

In an approach to address the challenges of student retention and graduation rates, North Park University opted to collaborate with [Trivium BI](#) to collect and analyze crucial data. Recognizing the intricate relationship between financial considerations and enrollment trends, the university embarked on a comprehensive examination of these intersecting factors. Despite the challenges in securing a specialized institutional research professional, the university’s leadership demonstrated agility by not waiting to fortify its data analytics capabilities. Instead, they allocated budgeted funds to engage Trivium BI’s services, underscoring their commitment to digging deeper into the critical issues at hand and fostering data-informed decision-making across the institution.