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Building Capacity to Improve Student Outcomes at Wiley University

Optimizing Resources, Leveraging Expertise, and Sustaining Momentum

Wiley University is a small, private, historically Black institution (HBCU) in Marshall, Texas. Founded in 1873, Wiley is one of the oldest HBCUs west of the Mississippi River. With a focus on student-centered learning, Wiley provides a supportive and inclusive environment where students from diverse backgrounds can thrive academically and personally. The institution is known for its strong commitment to character development, civic responsibility, and social justice, instilling in its graduates a sense of purpose and a desire to make a positive impact in their communities.

Enhancing Data Analysis

Wiley University's chief business officer (CBO) is a champion of student outcomes and a strong advocate of using data-informed practices to guide priorities. The CBO saw the benefit of creating dashboards that could be shared with people across campus and help inform collaborative decisions to support enrollment activities and improve student outcomes.

Wiley needed a cost-effective solution that would not result in a large, recurring licensing expense. The low cost and easy access to Power BI reinforced that this was an ideal solution for Wiley. The resources available in the Financial Impact Analysis toolkit were what Wiley needed. However, with a very small, talented staff, there was not a lot of free time to be found that would allow internal staff to link Wiley's data to the dashboard templates. Utilizing NACUBO contacts, Wiley was matched with an outside developer who could link the data to the templates at a cost well below the cost of hiring another employee to do the work. This short-term contract solution was ideal.

Improvement Project

Leverage Dashboards to Analyze Data and Prioritize Activities and Resources

Toolkit Used

Financial Impact Analysis

Results

- Wiley accelerated the development of dashboards to inform decisions by supplementing the capacity of its internal talent pool and contracting with an outside vendor to link the Power BI templates in the toolkit directly to Wiley's data sources.
- Working with the developer who built the Power BI templates available in the Financial Impact Analysis toolkit, Wiley was able to refine the dashboards, and create a mechanism to support regular data updates to the dashboards that can be maintained by internal staff.



“We had data for days. That data had been cleaned up and validated. What we were missing was a way to visualize that data that could be shared with the hard-working people at Wiley who are on the front lines of serving our students.”

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George Stiell,

Senior Vice President for Business and Finance and CFO

Coordinating Logistics

As work began, Wiley’s CBO and Chief Technology Officer (CTO) met with the vendor hired to connect Wiley’s data to the template to coordinate VPN access and review the data sources that Wiley had available to link to the Financial Impact Analysis templates. Wiley had recently moved to a cloud-based ERP system, and the CTO was managing multiple high-impact projects simultaneously when efforts began to link Wiley’s data to the Power BI templates available in the toolkit.

Once data access was granted, the vendor and Wiley’s CTO worked in tandem to address any minor issues that arose. This collaborative effort was instrumental in ensuring a smooth transition. The vendor also provided Wiley with static views of the dashboard design, allowing Wiley to confirm that the content presented in the toolkit templates was in line with Wiley’s lexicon and programmatic structure.

Leveraging Dashboards

Wiley’s linked dashboards were handed off to the institution once the connections to its proprietary data sources were made. Wiley’s CBO continues to work with front-line employees and end users of the dashboards to identify areas to improve data analysis and visualizations, with specific emphasis on supporting enrollment and retention activities.

The focus of the work moved from building the dashboards to using the data to inform priorities and practices. A dedicated cross-functional team is working to strengthen retention, and data is beginning to be more effectively leveraged to disaggregate student data and understand where the best opportunities can be found to provide support and intervene to ensure retention. The work at Wiley University is in the early stages, but momentum is building.

Sustaining Momentum

Wiley University will maintain the momentum gained by using an outside vendor to accelerate its use of data to inform decisions. Considering current labor market dynamics, the CBO acknowledged using short-term assistance from vendors with essential expertise who can accelerate progress and is a good model for Wiley to continue to follow. Short-term assistance from a vendor with deep expertise is more affordable than filling a full-time position, and this approach will allow Wiley to shift funds to meet immediate needs as areas for improvement are identified.