

MIRO VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM

January 2022

Student Success Measures

Symposium Registration Form Questions & Answers

Q1: My main challenge is not having all the data in one place which makes it hard to provide information on the fly. It's also hard to explain retention data in a way people can understand and create visualizations that don't overwhelm a viewer. What do you do at your institution?

MIRO: We understand that it is inconvenient and troublesome to have the data all over the place, so that's why we devoted ourselves to create a centralized data reporting platform as presented in the demonstration. The purpose of the platform is to provide clean and transformed data that are ready to answer specific questions from different perspectives so that our users can quickly get data in a digestible report which, in return, enhances our office's efficiency.

As for the retention data, we agree that it is not always easy to explain the meaning of the data to non-IR people. Thus, we adopted several strategies to help our audience better understand and interpret data. For example, we publish analysis briefs to explain the data in texts. We also publish tables to facilitate viewers to clearly see the decrease in retention and the increase in graduation as time goes by. We also created video tutorials to explain the data in a vivid form.

So, a takeaway is that we strongly recommend that IR offices collaborate with colleagues with graphic design skills to improve the reports since data visualization plays a role in helping viewers understand data. At MIRO, we secure funding to hire a part-time graphic design student assistant and that significantly improves our ability to tell stories with data.

Q2: My main challenge is that people think they know what to measure and end up adding biases to the results. I heard this phrase that explains our situation, which goes: 'If there's data, let's use data. If there's only opinions, let's use mine' - and our management tends to think that we don't have the data!" What has your experience been like?

MIRO: I would assume that the colleague who asked this question is an institutional researcher. To be honest, we share a similar challenge here. Although our decision support system provides lots of data which address many questions, we still often hear some colleagues say they could not find the data they need. It is frustrating but understandable because people are busy and may not have time to get familiar with our data. We believe that institutional researchers need to take initiatives to get the words out and let more people know what we have done. That's why in the past few years, we have gradually shifted our efforts to inform our campus users what data we provide and what data means. Solely knowing what data is available is not enough. Understanding how to interpret the data is key to enabling users to actually use your data. For instance, the symposium series is part of the effort. People may not realize how much work goes into the symposium preparation. We thought since we are doing it, why not expand it to a larger audience that's beyond our university to bounce ideas around and generate more conversation.

Q3: It's hard to find appropriate ways to calculate and understand retention measures: for example, what does it mean to track retention by program? Should we track FT students by the major they enroll in? Does that make sense? Is there a common calculation for program level retention?

MIRO: That's a great question. We understand that the current IPEDS method only tracks the first-time, full-time students, which accounts for a small proportion of the student population in some institutions, and when it drills down to a program level, the number of students counted can be even smaller, which may skew the retention rates. We are not aware of a universally accepted way to calculate the program-level retention rates. As mentioned in our presentation, we created a persistence rate method to include all degree-seeking students, including first-time students and transfer students. Our method allows us to calculate persistence rates at different levels, such as university, college, department, major, and program.

For example, a program-level persistence rate means to calculate how successful a department's program retains and graduates all kinds of students within the program after excluding those who have changed programs. We believe that this method is more appropriate to track program persistence rates.

Q4: It's challenging to convince administrators that other student success metrics are also important and worth examining, not just graduation or retention. What do you think of that?

MIRO: Student success is a very complex concept, so we recommend looking at different data to inform our decisions and actions. At UH Mānoa, we have been promoting different student success measures through presentations, data briefs, and symposiums like today's event. Here, we want to deliver a key message to our campus data users, that our ultimate goal is to support students to succeed. Benchmarking numbers like retention and graduation rates are important and helpful, but what really matters is to understand students' experience, so we can find ways to help students overcome their obstacles and reach their best potential. We believe that retention and graduation rates should be a reflection of our work, not simply the goal. Like what economist Charles Goodhard said, "once a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure". We should never lose sight of what matters and our IR office always tries to find ways to deliver that message.

Q5: How do you display multiple measures at once in a way that is easy for viewers to understand?

MIRO: We try to incorporate commonly asked data and related measurements in one report. Since multiple datasets are presented, we organize them in tables to help viewers easily find the data needed. Also, the report can be long, so to help viewers quickly find the data, we added interactive features to the sidebar of the online report. Viewers can clearly see what measurements are provided in the report, and by clicking on them, they will be directed to the corresponding data tables within a second. To help viewers understand the meaning of data, we even created online Report Help pages for certain complex reports to explain the meaning of each data element and the calculation methods.

Another situation is that sometimes, the same datasets can answer different questions. In this case, we designed different online reports to serve different needs.

Q6: Everyone is responsible for student success, including students themselves. It would be great if the speakers could discuss the key roles that students play in their successes.

MIRO: As mentioned in the presentation, we administered a campus-wide Campus Experience Survey. From the open-ended survey question responses, we see that many students recognize the importance of holding themselves accountable in their own college success, especially when they answer the questions of why the current semester is going well or not going well. We created an indicator called “student accountability” to summarize comments that touched on the topic. Students mentioned that they felt that they were successful because they tried their best to step out of their comfort zone to make more friends or try new things, set up short term and long term goals in academia to make sure they were on the right track, and manage their time and life balance well. Sharing those ideas and experiences with other students can be convincing, because the comments are directly from their peers. So yes, many students are aware of their own responsibilities in student success and adopt various strategies to help themselves do better in school and life.

Q7: How can we meet students’ needs while they try to adapt and succeed in a university environment?

MIRO: This question is very important but it’s almost impossible to answer with numbers alone. We believe that listening to student voices is key to answering the question, so we strongly recommend paying more attention to qualitative data, like open-ended survey questions and interviews. We demonstrated a small portion of our qualitative web apps today, and will go in-depth in our [February symposium](#). We hope to see you there and are excited to continue the conversation.

Online Questions & Answers

Q1: What process outcomes have you found to be most useful/informative?

Jillian Kinzie: Student engagement in instructional practices that matter; involvement in HIPs; climate measures and interaction around diversity; students exposure/interaction with employers and in their fields of interest.

Q2: Any thoughts about survey fatigue and balancing the need to collect data with the (seemingly) never ending survey cycle?

Jillian Kinzie: Survey fatigue is real, yet, asking and using survey data is important. Thoughtful planning to avoid overlaps and overasks is key, and so is spacing surveys, and understanding what is a reasonable/acceptable Response Rate (50% is not necessary), and most importantly, showing what difference survey data make... so these data influenced the establishment of XYZ.

Q3: When it comes to gathering data on intangibles, do you have any strategies for balancing the need for administering student surveys for the data collection and generalized survey fatigue?

MIRO: We would recommend collaborating with offices across the campus and see if some homegrown surveys are merged or scheduled at different times to reduce student fatigue. Also, open-ended questions and interviews are very helpful to really understand the issues and find solutions. Another suggestion is to have an honest review and discussion on what survey questions really help your team understand things to make improvements; if there are surveys that don't help, really ask yourselves if you should continue conducting those surveys.

Q4: What did you guys use to make/create that? [referring to Decision Support apps]

MIRO: Our web apps are actually custom built, developed by MIRO's IT specialists over the years. (To get a little more technical, they're mostly built with the PHP coding language, backed by a MySQL database, with some data visualization software libraries on top.)

Q: Can you advise what tools you use to theme qualitative data?

MIRO: We developed qualitative data programs ourselves based on the method Yang used for her dissertation. We are blessed to have IR and IT professionals with linguistics backgrounds. We will talk about the details at the February's symposium. Hope you can join us. It would be very interesting.

Q6: Can persistence be defined?

MIRO: We define persistence rates as the overall success rates, a combination of retention and graduation rates.

Q7: Do you have to manually check the qualitative comment themes, or do you simply use anything that contains the keywords?

MIRO: We have programmed the keyword system (dictionary) and can display tens of thousands of qualitative data within hours, but it is still a manual process to read all comments to hide confidential information which may not be captured by our data auditing program.

Q8: This may already have been answered, but will the recording be available?

MIRO: Yes, we will announce the symposium recording program through our newsletter.

Please use this link to sign up the newsletter:

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/miro/subscribe2/>

