

Case Study 1

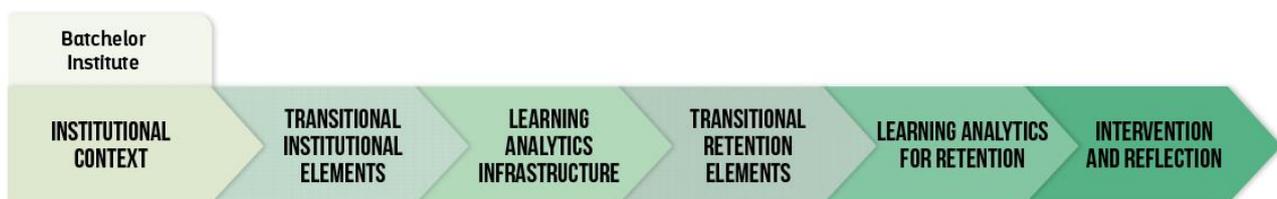
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

This case study presents an overview of the use of learning analytics for retention purposes at the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. With reference to the framework it primarily illustrates how factors relating to the *Institutional Context* play a central role in approaches to retention and subsequently in shaping thinking about how learning analytics might be used. Batchelor Institute holds a ‘both-ways’ philosophy that recognises the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to determine the nature of their engagement with various knowledge systems, in particular their own intellectual and social traditions and practices in the past, the present, and into the future. In and of itself, this has implications for how learning analytics and student data might be owned, managed and used.

In a more practical sense, Batchelor Institute has a relatively small cohort of Higher Education students and the vast majority of these are part of the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Education (ACIKE), which is a partnership with Charles Darwin University. Many of these students utilise a face-to-face workshop format and class sizes are typically small enough to ensure relationships can be built between students themselves and between the teacher and each student. Relationship building is explicitly seen as a key element of retaining students at the Batchelor Institute. Ultimately this means that some of the key functions of learning analytics such as identifying patterns in large data and personalising learning at scale, for example, are not as applicable or valuable as they might be in other contexts.

Overall, the Batchelor Institute case study explores how institutional factors play a key role in how retention issues are framed and addressed. It also explores the idea that learning analytics is one of a range of tools that institutions can use to try and address retention and thus is of more value in some contexts than others.

The figure below illustrates where the Batchelor Institute case study fits in relation to the *Let's Talk Learning Analytics and Retention* framework.



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Institutional Background

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, a dual sector provider, exists to serve the education needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia. The Institute has a 40 year long history of providing education and training to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Engagement with Indigenous Australians is fundamental to the vision, values, governance, operations and delivery functions at Batchelor Institute. The delivery of services is guided by a series of culturally specific strategies, plans, policies, procedures and frameworks of engagement with Indigenous peoples. Pathways to Higher Education and Higher Degrees by Research, and specialist research in Indigenous perspectives, are primary focus areas of Batchelor Institute. Batchelor Institute is a partner in The Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE), through which higher education degrees are offered to its students. Batchelor's higher education students study their units online through ACIKE, but also have face-to-face workshops at Batchelor Campus and the Desert Peoples Centre in Alice Springs. Batchelor Institute also offers a large VET program, which is not included in this project and therefore not discussed in this case study.

At the heart of Batchelor Institute's 'both-ways' philosophy lies the recognition of the legitimate right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to determine the nature of their engagement with various knowledge systems, in particular their own intellectual and social traditions and practices in the past, the present, and into the future. An important element in this process has been the use of e-learning, mobile and social media technologies to make the learning relevant and to develop digital literacy skills.

Batchelor Institute students

Of the just over 3900 students enrolled at Batchelor Institute only 7.7% are studying in Higher Education and Research area. Almost 50% the HE students reside in the Northern Territory and most of them live in remote communities. 78% of Batchelor's HE students are female. The average age across the HE section for both male and female is 38 years. With the exception of 2 Higher Degree by Research students, all Batchelor Institute students are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students.

Higher Education courses

Batchelor Institute students participate in higher education through the ACIKE partnership (between CDU and Batchelor Institute), and they have access to the following fields of study:

- Within ACIKE, two enabling courses are offered, called Preparation for Tertiary Success (PTS), and in 2014 they had an overall enrolment of 67. These courses are offered in a combination of face-to-face workshops and online.
- Education courses include a Bachelor of Education (Primary Teaching) (39 Batchelor Institute students enrolled, with an overall student load of 24.75), and a Bachelor of Learning and Teaching (Early Childhood) (28 Batchelor Institute students enrolled, with an overall student load of 16.625). Education courses are offered as face-to-face workshops (for Batchelor Institute students) & online, mixed mode (internal & external).
- Health courses include a Bachelor of Health Science (16 Batchelor Institute students enrolled, with an overall student load of 7), and a Bachelor of Nursing Pre-registration (93

Batchelor Institute students enrolled, with an overall student load of 42.125). Health courses are offered as face-to-face workshops & online, or external.

- A number of courses are offered through ACIKE that specifically address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges. These include Diploma of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges (5 enrolled students), Diploma of Creative and Indigenous Writing (7 enrolled students), Bachelor of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advocacy (23 student enrolled), Bachelor of Indigenous Languages and Linguistics (16 students enrolled), Bachelor of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges (Honours) (1 student enrolled), Graduate Certificate in Sustainable Indigenous Partnerships (new unit; no numbers available), Graduate Diploma in Indigenous Policy Development (5 students enrolled), and Graduate Certificate in Yolngu Studies (1 student enrolled). Various combinations of face-to-face workshops (for Batchelor Institute students) & online, and mixed mode (internal & external) apply to each of these courses.
- The postgraduate program is a Batchelor Institute only program and includes a Masters of Indigenous Perspectives by Research (8 students enrolled) and a Doctor of Philosophy Indigenous Perspectives (6 students enrolled). The postgraduate program is offered in a combination of face-to-face workshops, self-study, supported by a Moodle-based learning space.

Analytics: Current State of Play at Batchelor Institute

There is currently no clear strategy in place at Batchelor Institute with regards to Learning Analytics. This is due to a number of factors. Firstly, there are very low numbers of higher education students who are directly under Batchelor Institute's administrative control. Only those in the Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) program are under Batchelor Institute's direct administrative control, and these are currently 14 students. ACIKE students are administratively speaking CDU students, which means that data is collected from within CDU's systems. In other words, these students are enrolled through CDU's student information system (Callista), and the online units they study are in CDU's Learnline (Blackboard) system. Thus, data collected about these students are collected via Blackboard Analytics. This tool has recently been made available to ACIKE lecturers (including lecturers employed by Batchelor Institute) to be used in the units they teach, but apart from an initial information session, which not all lecturers attended, Batchelor Institute lecturers have not yet been trained in how to use this tool. Further training sessions will be available in March 2015.

The HDR students have two or three face-to-face workshops per year, and while there is a MyLearn site (Moodle) with resources and a discussion forum, only very few of them make regular use of this, and some never do. In addition, we use a number of 'secret' Facebook groups, but again, the use of these is voluntary and not directly linked to the program. Other digital tools that are used by some of our HDR students include Dropbox, Academia.edu, Researchgate.net, Mendeley, Skype, and a range of Google apps. In each case, there are 'analytics' that can be drawn from these sites, but this is currently not being done, at least not in a coherent and consistent manner.

Beyond Learnline (Blackboard), the PTS program also uses a 'secret' Facebook group, as well as a course blog where students share their stories about being in the program (<http://tertiarysuccess.wordpress.com/>). In the case of the Facebook group, this creates a community

of learners, which includes PTS graduates who stay involved in this group beyond their enrolment in the program. It is also often the most efficient way for PTS lecturers to stay in touch with students who go home to their communities after the face-to-face workshops. While some students frequently change phone numbers, and even sim cards, they do consistently check their Facebook accounts. Again, some data are being used selectively from this engagement in digital environments, but not in a coherent and consistent manner at this stage. Lecturers in other programs (e.g. Batchelor of Nursing Pre-Registration) have recently also begun to use 'secret' Facebook groups for similar reasons.

At Batchelor Institute, different systems, such as the Learning Management System (MyLearn/Moodle), the Student Information System (Callista), the Batchelor Institute website (Wordpress), the research repository (ePrints), and the intranet (MyShare/Sharepoint) are currently not integrated in any way. The Institute is in the planning phase of transitioning to Sharepoint 2013, and the expectation is that this will ultimately lead to integration of at least some of these systems, but this is still some way off. While each of these systems is capable of collecting data, there is currently no consistent or coherent approach to collecting such data, nor a coherent strategy around doing so (apart from enrolment and resulting data for reporting purposes via Callista). Batchelor Institute currently does not use specific Learning Analytics software.

Data collection and student retention

At Batchelor Institute, retention strategies are almost exclusively based on building relationships. Relationships are central to the way students engage with each other, with their communities, and with their lecturers. Thus, relationships are crucial to every part of the student learning journey, whether in the recruitment phase (which is in many ways dependent on word-of-mouth), the PTS program, in ACIKE courses, or in Batchelor Institute's HDR program. In the recruitment phase students are actively and personally supported by an Academic Advisor, who actively helps them through the enrolment process. This initial relationship building mostly occurs over the phone. Thereafter much of the relationship building occurs in face-to-face contexts, and thus happens when the students are on campus for workshops. This is currently still very much the dominant mode, and it involves a range of support and administration staff as well e.g. student travel, student services, residential and kitchen staff. When students are off campus the relationship building and maintenance happens through continuous extensive telephone conversations. In this way, students become part of the 'Batchelor family'. The sense of belonging to "a family" is the most powerful element of retention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students, because it happens in a culturally safe and respectful manner. This is particularly important because many Batchelor Institute students are firstly away from their community, and secondly often are the first in their families to go to university. Lecturers play a crucial part in developing this sense of community and belonging. Batchelor lecturers often play roles (friends, counsellors, mentors, etc.) that go well beyond what is usually in the job description of academics.

Students have further access to designated student mentors within the ACIKE environment. These mentors provide pastoral and counselling services, to support student through difficult times in their learning journey, thus retaining them in their program of study. The sense of community has long been the way in which students are monitored and students at risk of dropping out are identified immediately. While social media are increasingly becoming part of this relationship development and maintenance, much of it still happens largely in a face-to-face workshop context. It is important to note that outside the workshop environment Batchelor Institute lecturers are in regular phone and email contact with students.

If students who are enrolled in various units do not engage with Learnline within the first few weeks of semester, staff are alerted via Learnline, and they make contact with the students to find out the reason of absenteeism. During this stage staff actively provide students with academic advice and guide them through the initial stage of their learning journey.

As noted, the idea of learning analytics, the consistent use of data to improve learning and teaching and/or the student learning journey at Batchelor Institute is currently very much in its infancy. Of course all of Batchelor Institute's undergraduate students study through ACIKE, and their lecturers and administrators can therefore access CDU's Learnline analytics tool. This is currently not yet happening in a consistent manner, and it will take some professional development to engage teaching staff with the potential of this tool, especially for student retention. This will be particularly relevant in programs such as the Bachelor of Education (Primary Teaching) and the Bachelor of Teaching and Learning Early Childhood, where the online materials are developed for 'mainstream' CDU students (both internal and external), and where it is important for Batchelor's lecturers to be able to analyse how Batchelor's students are doing in the online environment, and then respond appropriately. Batchelor Institute has developed a new professional development framework, based on a Communities of Practice model, and the implementation will be rolled out in 2015. Developing a consistent approach to making use of opportunities that learning analytics provide, especially with regards to retention and progression of Batchelor Institute students, will be incorporated into professional development planning for 2015.

Key Lessons and Findings

The key findings at Batchelor Institute are that learning analytics, and its potential, are not yet on the radar in a consistent manner beyond a few isolated individuals with a particular interest in it. This includes the two Batchelor Institute participants in this project. Data are being collected at Batchelor Institute, for example about enrolments and results, and about student engagement via various online environments, but this is currently done in a relatively ad hoc manner, and none of the data from different systems is being integrated and aligned in a coherent and consistent manner. This situation is complicated further by the fact that almost all Batchelor Institute higher education students (apart from the postgraduate cohort) are ACIKE (and therefore administratively CDU) students. However, this does create a good opportunity for Batchelor Institute to 'piggyback' on CDU's learning analytics tools, and leverage this opportunity to achieve better student engagement, and therefore better retention and progression. This requires a shift in current practice, and some targeted professional development, which will be a challenge. However, Batchelor Institute's higher education lecturers are a relatively small group, which makes the process of familiarising them with the potential of integrating analytics data into their everyday practice a realistic proposition that can be achieved relatively fast.