Longitudinal Analysis of Variables Influencing Student Retention in Online Environments

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Abstract

A variety of societal and economic factors have caused the growth of online programs to far outpace traditional programs in higher education. However, this rapid growth has brought with it significant scrutiny of retention rates in the online environment. While some work has been done using point in time disenrollment data, longitudinal patterns have not been examined. To understand how variables related to student retention change over time this study did compared undergraduate retention data (n > 100,000) and related regression analyses over four year period. The findings demonstrated that some variables, such as transfer credits, account for large amounts of variance at all levels, however, other predictor variables have greater or lesser importance as students progress through their program of studies. This presentation will elaborate on the findings and suggest methods for utilizing these types of dynamic models for multi-faceted interventions.