

Southern Connecticut State University Enrolls IBM Watson Analytics To Help Improve Student Academic Achievement

ARMONK, N.Y., July 20, 2017 /PRNewswire/ -- IBM (NYSE: [IBM](#)) announced today that [Southern Connecticut State University](#) (SCSU) has integrated IBM Watson Analytics to help create new services and programs based on data-driven insights to improve students' academic achievement and development.

The university used [IBM's Watson Analytics Professional](#) to unearth insights from millions of student data points to help improve student retention rates and keep them on a path to graduation. It also adopted the solution as the core of an innovative new internship program designed to enhance the University's relationships with local businesses while helping prepare the students for possible careers in data science.

Watson Analytics is a data analysis and visualization service that runs on [IBM Cloud](#) and empowers people to discover patterns and meaning in their data quickly and easily. With guided data discovery, automated predictive analytics and cognitive capabilities, such as the ability to ask questions in natural language, people can interact with data conversationally to unearth insights quickly and in formats they can easily understand.

Like many colleges and universities across the U.S., SCSU was looking for ways to improve student retention rates. While financial and personal reasons play a role in early withdrawal from school, many students also transfer to other schools, take online courses at other universities, enroll in summer sessions at other schools, or simply take their sophomore year off completely.

The University turned to Watson Analytics to help develop an early warning system of student withdrawal from school. In analyses of the data from a ten-year study, SCSU unearthed a key unexpected finding: that students' experiences on campus accurately predicted whether they would stay at the university, graduate from the university, transfer to a private or another public university, transfer to a community college, or withdraw from higher education.

This represented a major shift in mindset at SCSU about research in higher education, which typically relies on students' incoming profiles and demographic characteristics – things like ethnicity, income, SAT scores, etc. – in predictive models of whether students will be successful.

"When we began integrating Watson Analytics into our cohort studies, new insights around our data surfaced that we hadn't even considered," said Dr. Michael Ben-Avie, Director of the Office of Assessment and Planning at SCSU. "So we were able to start making decisions that were informed by data, rather than anecdotes. The shift from data-laden reports to infographics with visualizations from Watson Analytics considerably helped in this regard."

SCSU took the insights and began crafting programs based on the data. One of the most successful initiatives that emerged, so far, has been SCSU's [Academic Success Center](#), which coordinates tutorial services, provides study-skill enrichments programs, and offers academic coaching and structured learning assistance. Since opening in 2015, the number of visits to tutors has jumped from 500 to 3,000.

Innovative Internship Program

SCSU also built an innovative new internship program around Watson Analytics that puts the solution in the hands of students from the University's School of Business and Computer Science Department who are interested in possible careers in data science.

The program kicked off in the spring of 2017 and included four pairs of interns who brought Watson Analytics with them to local

businesses, including the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce and the Regional Water Authority of South Central Connecticut. With the program, the students worked to help the businesses improve their performance by mining their existing data volumes for insights that would lead to data-driven decisions.

In addition, and in partnership with the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce, the program offers a course that combines computer science, marketing, and statistics with an internship. With these tools in hand, students apply Watson Analytics and their own creativity to address challenging questions from local businesses.

Headed by Dr. Ben-Avie, the program focuses on priority projects. "We're able to suggest projects, or if a business already has one in mind, the interns can start working with them right away," said Dr. Ben-Avie. "They go in and help from the start with organizing files, constructing comprehensive spreadsheets, pulling together the raw data."

The interns organize, analyze, and interpret that data using Watson Analytics. At the conclusion of their internship, they present their findings and solutions to the local businesses.

The internship program is mutually beneficial. Interns earn academic credits, gain experience in using cognitive analytics in a real-world workplace, and receive a badge from IBM that helps them when searching for a job or applying to graduate school. The businesses not only receive the work and dedication of the interns, but also the faculty network supporting them.

"SCSU is a great example of a university using analytical innovation in innovative ways," said Marc Altshuler, General Manager, Watson Analytics, IBM. "The team there, already long-invested in analytical research, had the foresight to tap into Watson Analytics to build upon its statistical results even further, and to great effect."

Data analyses also demonstrated that an important predictor of retention is students' financial literacy. The results of analyses informed the decision to set up a new office of Financial Literacy and Advising. In March 2017, SCSU was notified that it ranked among the top 50 Financial Literacy Programs in the country. In the letter of congratulation, LendEDU wrote, "Financial literacy amongst college students is as important as ever, and your school has become a leader in the field."

[\[https://lendedu.com/blog/top-50-college-financial-literacy-programs/\]](https://lendedu.com/blog/top-50-college-financial-literacy-programs/).

About Southern Connecticut State University

For more information on SCSU visit www.southernct.edu.

About IBM Watson Analytics

For more information on IBM Watson Analytics visit www.ibm.com/watson-analytics.

About IBM Cloud

For more information on IBM Cloud visit, www.ibm.com/cloud-computing/.

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