Katy Oliveira (00:07):

Welcome to Next Practices Data-informed strategies to shape the future of higher ed. In each episode, you'll hear from transformational higher ed leaders on how they're tackling today's most pressing challenges to make a difference for their students and institutions. I'm your host, Katy Oliveira.

Chris Campbell (00:28):

You really need to understand your students. They are much more than freshmen and sophomores and juniors and seniors. They are individuals. They all have challenges. They all receive differing levels of support from their network, and as you consider the student as a human, the whole human, it will truly inform how you can better provide support, and you'll be surprised, very surprised at how well they respond and how successful they can be.

Katy Oliveira (01:05):

In this episode, I'm talking with Chris Campbell. Chris Campbell is the Chief Information Officer at DeVry University, awarded the CIO award in 2022. DeVry Care engine leverages technology, predictive analytics, and observational insights deliver outreach to students right when needed. Key to this success is the partnership between IT academics and student success. That is reinventing the learner experience. In this episode, you'll hear how DeVry University has built their care engine, how they infuse data informed practice across all levels of their institution and how they're incorporating emerging AI technologies into their student success work. And we'll also hear how they work together to ensure their students reach their goals. But before we dive in, take a moment to subscribe to the show to stay up to date on the latest and creative data informed approaches to student success. Chris, welcome to Next Practices. I'm so happy that you're here today.

Chris Campbell (02:07):

Thank you very much for having me. Looking forward to it.

Katy Oliveira (02:10):

Well, let's get started by having you tell me a little bit about DeVry University, who it serves its mission and your role in it.

Chris Campbell (02:19):

Sure. So DeVry University, we strive to close society's opportunity gap, preparing learners to thrive in careers shaped by continuous technological change. We serve and empower learners who want to succeed, particularly those who lack the options to do so with traditional higher education. We do this through innovative programs, relevant partnerships, and exceptional care. We really empower our students to meaningfully improve their lives, workplaces and their communities. Myself specifically, I serve as the chief information officer at DeVry University and I have responsibilities for the technology all the way front to back. In addition to that, I have responsibilities for cybersecurity and finally I have responsibilities for the university-wide PMO, driving strategic initiatives across the university. And then as everybody knows, my number one responsibility for the technology team is to keep the systems online and consistent. Right, really table stakes before you get to partner on the more interesting strategic things.

Katy Oliveira (03:23):

Can you tell me a little bit about what the top challenges you and your team are working to solve right now for your students and your institution?

Chris Campbell (03:32):

Yeah, I think we are always working on what's next. We have a culture of strong continuous improvement, so we are always, while we are doing well with persistence and retention and our students are doing well with course success and matriculation, we always are working on how to be a little bit better. And when you put it in that context, we're always working on our data. We're a data hungry institution. We use it to inform what we're doing and when we're doing it. More recently, we are working hard on the best ways to leverage artificial intelligence, both in the learning experience and in the support experience for students.

Katy Oliveira (04:15):

Do you mind talking a little bit more about the combination of data informed strategies that you're using? I know that you have from previous speaking that you've done. I know that DeVry has a pretty sophisticated care engine that you've developed. Do you mind speaking a little bit about that and maybe any other data informed strategies that your institution is using to help make a difference for your students and your staff and institution?

Chris Campbell (04:42):

Sure. So we do have the DeVry digital care engine and award-winning combination of technologies and data management strategies that allow us to provide care for our students when and where they need it, and really it serves as an amplifying factor for our faculty and advisors as they care for and assist our students through their educational journey. The DeVry digital care engine is a combination of technologies, everything from our student information system to our CRM and our learning management system, and it's how we bring data together that informs us of the student journey and where the opportunities are to provide additional care for our students and we see great success with it, but it's a constant journey, right? We are always looking at the data, evaluating it, reevaluating it. Even in our care engine, we make changes to how certain things work when we're not seeing the results that we expect.

(05:47):

We have a robust set of KPIs and metrics that we use around course success and persistence. The two primary ones, our care engine automated nudges and reminders for students that, Hey, don't forget you have an assignment due on Wednesday or whatever. So those types of things are how we use digital care. What we're seeing now though is we're starting to inject some of the more advanced generative AI capabilities into that ecosystem through enabling chatbots or chat in various interfaces that our students use and we're working to have a more realistic conversation with the student as we're trying to help them.

Katy Oliveira (06:30):

I know one place that a lot of institutions find challenge is having that data informed approach, bringing their data together, integrating their technology across institutions so that they can have that holistic picture of their students. Do you mind sharing a little bit of background around how your institution came to this place and what it kind looked like before and how they got to where they are now?

Chris Campbell (06:58):

We have always been very data-centric, and so we've always done a lot of work, often manually, often consolidating data from disparate systems through just hard work and Excel and Power bi simple things. And then we have since augmented our capabilities using effectively a data lake. We've long had a data warehouse, but we found timeliness of data was a bit of a challenge, so we've been working with a data lake approach so that we can enhance the speed to which we get the data, which allows us to be much more actionable in reality, we pull the data from three or four key systems. I mentioned student information system, the learning management system, the CRM, and then we actually have a couple of other smaller ones that we pull some data from. But the idea is we consolidated in the data lake and we use that as our center hub. Now. One of our great benefits is that we have a centralized CRM and all of our student journeys are represented there, and so we're able to use that as a center point of the identity, understanding those students, which enables us to bring our data together a bit more efficiently and effectively.

Katy Oliveira (08:14):

Yeah. I know in the fall you had the opportunity to present at Ed during that presentation, you shared a little bit about having access to that data revealed and some of the student success adjustments and refinements that you're able to make a real difference for your student. Do you mind sharing some of the work that having visibility into better understanding your student population over time is allowing you in your team to implement?

Chris Campbell (08:44):

So I'll share a couple of scenarios, right? When we first started down the digital care engine journey, one of the first things we found was that we were starting with an email channel and we were sending communications to our students to remind them that they had an assignment due or perhaps offer tutoring in the event the data showed that they would benefit from it, those types of things. The students weren't opening the emails and they certainly weren't taking action and through analyzing the data that we had available, like when are students actually logging into our portal or when are they logging into the learning management system, we were able to identify that, which seems obvious today, but as the dev device student is very typically a full-time working student and they very much tend to do their educational work in the evenings, we found that just by changing when we sent the email instead of sending it at eight o'clock in the morning, we would send the email to them at six o'clock in the evening, which is when they're opening their email.

(09:51):

So you're in the top of the inbox more opportunity to have that message seen, and we saw a relatively substantial thousands of basis point improvement in open rates. And then the next piece we found was they weren't clicking through. So we started adjusting the messaging a little bit and making sure that we very much could provide actionable and in the moment opportunity to take action on our suggestions. So by that alone, we were able to increase read rates, we were able to increase click-throughs and resulting able to increase course persistence and retention. Generally speaking, it was super effective and what we really had to do was stop and think through the journey and think through the student profiles and think through their life and how we could best support them. And the answers became pretty obvious once we looked at that. So that's one of our best stories.

(10:50):

And another one that we thought was very interesting was we decided to do a good job outreach to the students. So anybody who got in their class, we would send a note to them, congratulating them on their academic success and provided them a link and a suggestion to share with their friends and family on their favorite social media and huge impact. Not only did we see lots of activity on the social media platforms, but we actually also did see session to session retention improvements. So that second one really wasn't data first, it was more us thinking about the students' lives and their need for this emotional support and scaffolding as they go through their educational journey. And then it was validated through the data that we could see after the fact.

Katy Oliveira (11:45):

Right. If I remember correctly from your presentation, you have a beautiful blend between using the insights from data, but also behavioral psychology, observation of your students, understanding of your students to tailor some of these outreaches and to really think about who are our students and what do they mean and what are the best ways to engage with them. Am I remembering that properly?

Chris Campbell (12:09):

Absolutely. And in fact, in the last year, we recognized the need to bring not just data, but also to bring that behavioral psychology or just behavioral methods to help encourage and support the students. And so we recognized that real need and our CEO Elisa WA established a chief experience officer role that is very, very focused on the total student journey and looking at it from the perspective of it's wonderful what the data tells us, but let's think about the student as a person, as an individual, and let's craft that support that they need in the way that they need it. And so we're putting a lot even more energy into that aspect of what we do.

Katy Oliveira (12:56):

It's really great because I find sometimes in our higher ed discourse, we can take an either or perspective and folks will say, well, the data is different than maybe the student I'm seeing in front of me. And others will say, well, the data reveals trends, and that could be, but I think thinking about it as the data points out some trends and information that maybe we can address systemically and then thinking about our students and approaching them from a behavioral perspective and thinking about them as all people and humans helps us actually tailor interventions that are going to resonate, that we might've gotten a signal are needed based on the data. So it's really a marriage of these things, and I find that partner institutions and institutions that I see are being very successful are doing this really well.

Chris Campbell (13:43):

It's really powerful. I think data does a great job of providing opportunities to explore. Then once you put it in the context of a human, the whole person that helps you, and then data comes around again to help you fingerprint or identify through whatever telemetry you have that some assistance is required. And then once you design how you're going to help the student and you implement that, then data helps you yet again identify whether or not that's had the intended impact or not. Right. More than one time tried something that just absolutely did not work and turned it off. So it's about learning and pivoting and lots of exploration, a lot of thoughtfulness.

Katy Oliveira (14:32):

Next practices is brought to you by Civitas Learning Learning. Civitas Learning Learning help higher education institutions improve student outcomes through data activated decision making and collaboration. Intelligent student success software equips teams with real-time insights and workflow solutions to support the entire student lifecycle, enabling leaders to implement strategies that improve retention and graduation rates, and promote the financial health of their institutions. To learn more about how you can proactively support student success at scale, visit civitaslearning.com.

(15:08):

I think one place that I see people are using data, they use it at a strategic decision making level and also, or depending on the institution, use it at the user frontline staff level to help them manage their day-to-day outreach or prioritize how they're going to be engaging with students. With that in mind, what kind of people and processes have you put in place to implement this data informed approach? How are the people on your campus using data and how are you gathering? Just for an example, I know some institutions have regular meetings where they investigate and see what the data is telling them. Some institutions have certain parties on campus that are doing that work and then making decisions. What does that look like at DeVry?

Chris Campbell (15:57):

A great question. At DeVry, really data is intrinsic to our culture or leveraging data is part of our DNA. So what you see at DeVry at a high level is we have a hybrid model. It's not highly centralized, so we have much of the data analysis is happening in the various functional teams advising or faculty teams, et cetera. They're often doing the deep analysis of what the data is saying. We have very centralized though the data management aspects of it and the delivery of insights once they're validated. So we distribute very much the discovery of insights and we leverage the broad group, and that's something that's going on all the time at DeVry, not necessarily needing to have a meeting to do that. It's happening often. We do though have a digital care engine steering committee that I do chair where we leverage technical product managers, data analysts, communication specialists, our chief experience officer is in that group, our provost is in that group, and we do come together on a regular basis to talk about areas of opportunity to talk about areas where maybe it's not working quite as well as we think it should.

(17:19):

Our head of enrollment and student services will also join and we get feedback from that channel letting us know how students are responding or not to what we're doing, or perhaps they have some anecdotal information based on the calls that they're having with students, et cetera, that will factor in. So it's a really robust community and I would say we're blessed that DeVry, that we have people that are that interested and that are that curious to find the insights and then we have a strong collaboration functional teams to help bring that story together.

Katy Oliveira (17:53):

I know before when you were sharing some of the shifts that you were able to make an approach that you shared some outcomes of what you were able to see Based on those efforts, are there any more outcomes or broad successes that you're excited about that you've been able to achieve or goals that you've been able to reach by doing work this way?

Chris Campbell (18:14):

There's always something going on in all those areas where we find something and it seems to work right, and I would tell you that the ride digital care engine is encompassing of an overall strategy, and that strategy includes test and learn through manual processes before we may fully automate something. So an area, for example, that we're working on right now is that we identified several key events or key items that new students should participate in that will help them achieve success in their first and second courses. And so we know that by the students joining and participating in a community forum that will help ease some of their concerns about starting an educational journey. It's a big deal when you're a working adult to try to find the time and energy to do that, and the students can have a lot of negative, and so by getting them involved in a community of like-minded individuals, it really does help them be successful as they go in.

(19:17):

So we've identified that and we're working on the automated journeys to help ensure that they participate in that and we know that also attending the new student orientation is important to get them acclimated and we have a preview period in our learning management system, and if they attend that, that also helps 'em get acclimated and increase their likelihood of success when they join the course because we've familiarized them with the tools and we've familiarized them with the content and how everything is organized, and we spend some time with that. So we're building journeys today because we already know that's successful, and that's the trick, finding the opportunity, validating the opportunity, and then we go to make it efficient and personal to the student.

Katy Oliveira (20:03):

So before you expand it, you test it, embed it to make sure it is going to drive and help you reach your goals. You're using that analysis throughout the entire process.
Chris Campbell (20:12):

You got it.

Katy Oliveira (20:14):

Well, I want to leave a little time for you to share other lessons learned that leaders who might be in similar situations are in that maybe I didn't ask you about or that you want to make sure folks know before we sign off.

Chris Campbell (20:27):

I think first and foremost, if you're like me and you're sitting in a technology leader position, you got to make sure your systems are stable and that things are working well, and then while you're doing that or as you do that, you need to develop very strong partnerships across the university. The provost and I have a strong relationship, the chief experience officer and I and our head of enrollment and student support, we all have strong relationships with each other and we really do approach it from a student-centric perspective, thinking about the total journey. That's first, you have to really understand and be able to work together with those folks in the organization that can pull it all together. Secondly, for us, it's been super important to have faculty support, so an extension of a good relationship with the provost is including our faculty in what we're doing to help, because at the end of the day, what we're doing is amplifying the already incredible care and education delivered by our amazing faculty.

(21:30):

We're just trying to amplify it. We're not in any way replacing it, but it requires a lot of communication. Same thing with our advisors, so don't overlook that. The last thing I think that I would just leave everybody is you really need to understand your students. They are much more than freshmen and sophomores and juniors and seniors. They are individuals. There is of course some grouping, but they are individuals. They all have challenges. They all receive differing levels of support from their network, and as you consider the student as a human, the whole human, it will truly inform how you can better provide support, and you'll be surprised, very surprised at how well they respond and how successful they can be.

Katy Oliveira (22:22):

I love that last point. I think that understanding your students and knowing that every college student isn't a monolithic group, that it's different. Different people attending different colleges at different times and understanding who you are serving so that you can tailor your services and your communication, your outreach to those students is really, really powerful. I'm seeing that emerge to their surface more and more and more across institutions who are finding a lot of success with how they support their students.

Chris Campbell (22:50):

It's amazing. You have everything. You have parents, grandparents, young adults, older adults, you have working adults, and they all have different lives and different challenges, and the idea is helping to provide the scaffolding that they need. It always amazes me when we see feedback from our students saying that my advisor or my faculty member, this is the first time somebody's really cared about my future and my education, and they're so grateful. And so we take that really to heart and try to extend that into what we're doing, right. As I've said, it's about how our care formula of which the care engine is part, we really need to understand the person and try to provide that care and scaffolding that they need to be successful at the end of the day. Yeah.

Katy Oliveira (23:40):

Well, Chris, thank you so much for coming on Next Practices. I really appreciate your

Katy Oliveira (23:44):

Time.

Chris Campbell (23:45):

Thank you very much for having me. I appreciate it and look forward to doing it again sometime.

Katy Oliveira (23:50):

Great. Thank you so much. Next practices are produced by Civitas Learning Learning Access More Next Practices and learn about how transformational leaders are moving student success forward by visiting civitaslearning.com. And if you enjoyed this episode, be sure to share it with a friend and subscribe anywhere you listen to podcasts to stay up to date on the latest data informed approaches to student success.