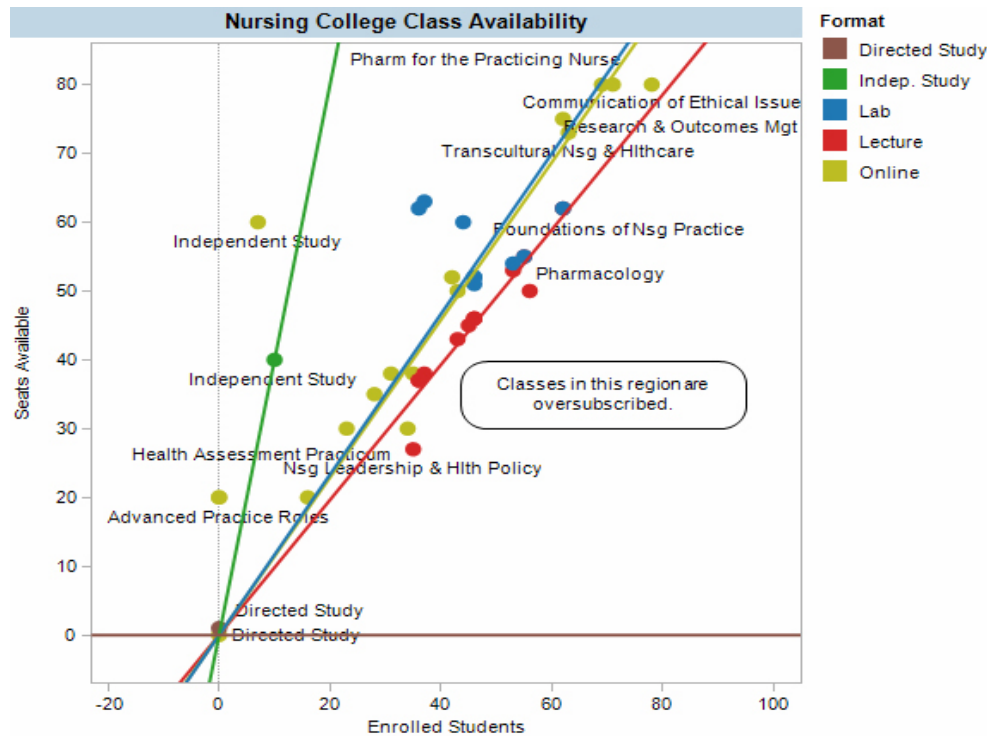


Jacksonville State University Optimizes Productivity with Tableau

Institutional Research and Assessment Group Conducts Analyses “in a Fraction of the Time”



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Dr. Alicia Simmons, Director of Institutional Research and Assessment
Jacksonville State University

Jacksonville State University, in Jacksonville, Alabama, is beautiful, the quintessential college campus. Every year more than 10,000 students from Alabama, the southeast and overseas attend JSU. Within the busy hub of the university, a stalwart team of four at the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment collects and analyzes organizational data. The Director, Dr. Alicia Simmons, grew up in Jacksonville and graduated from JSU. Twenty years later, her team’s work contributes to smooth operations across nearly 100 academic and non-academic departments with over 1,000 faculty and staff.

The small office struggled with the complex task of making credit hour productivity visible to departments and administrators. In the business of education that means looking for trends in student preference in the academic schedule. The team wanted to create optimal course calendars from term to term based on a solid understanding of the data. Pages and pages of spreadsheets made this job difficult.

Ultimately, it took too long to get the data into the spreadsheets to produce anything meaningful in time for optimal decision-making. Dr. Simmons, recognized that with such limited technology the university was headed down the slippery slope of inefficiency. For example, they could not easily identify that 8am classes do well but the same course at 3pm is not as popular. JSU continuously missed opportunities to make schedule adjustments that would best meet the needs of a diverse student body. She decided to take action.

There were no funds to hire new staff, so the team had to find other means to get the job done. They turned to Tableau Software to save time and resources. Dr. Simmons described the experience, "Tableau has helped us to provide systematic support to many different departments and increase the productivity of this department. We can do analyses that we did before in a fraction of the time. Even more important, we can do analyses we never could before."

Now JSU can visually analyze its master schedule and pick out opportunities to increase credit hour productivity. Everyone has the same view and access to the same data so decision making is accelerated. Data can be analyzed in nearly real-time, so patterns can be corrected in time for the start of the next term.

JSU also found another application for their Tableau visuals. The JSU Fact Book is an annual publication that reflects the history and progress of the university, and is distributed to JSU administration, faculty and the community. The publication used to take nearly a semester to complete in Excel. Now using Tableau, Simmons reported, "We can take the format we've set up and use it with next year's data. Saves a good bit of time versus re-creating in Excel." She added, "Our Fact Book was just awarded second place among all universities in the southeast at the Southern Association for Institutional Research conference."

For More Information About This Case

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