Oracle increases educational accessibility and enhances student success

Ovum view

Summary

Two major themes in higher education across the past decade have been about improving accessibility – enabling more students with the opportunity to learn – and facilitating student success – equipping them with the tools to thrive while a part of the higher education community. At this year's OpenWorld, Oracle shared how it plans to use machine learning, adaptive intelligence, and other technologies to commingle these missions. Oracle's higher education strategy is more expansive and data-driven than ever, thanks to its new cloud-based student information system (SIS), Student Management. With its first iteration of Student Management, Oracle is expanding its focus into the continuing education space. In doing so, it is supporting the increasing demand across the higher education industry and its constituents for nontraditional forms of education, which have previously been underserved by existing technologies. One of Student Management's most striking features is "Luci," Oracle's internal working title for its Virtual Assistant functionality, which uses machine learning and data analytics to create a personalized student experience. With these new offerings, Oracle will buttress institutions in their endeavors to increase educational accessibility and student success.

Oracle's Student Management accommodates alternative educational models

All higher education institutions have an interest in expanding educational outreach to a greater number of constituents to empower and equip them for the future. Educational models are thus increasingly expanding beyond the traditional pathways to encompass alternative formats, such as competency-based education and continuing education. In particular, continuing education and its "pay as you go" model can be a lucrative source of revenue for institutions; many employers are exploring micro-credentialing and badging offerings as ways for their employees to demonstrate their mastery of work-aligned skills and competencies.

While the diverse requirements and configurations of these nontraditional educational models are difficult to support in most conventional SISs, Student Management provides flexible, extensible, and integrative capabilities, according to each institution's user-defined needs. Perhaps of most interest to institutions pursuing competency-based models, Student Management enables the user institution to define its own academic time periods (as well as standard terms), which accommodates flexible or continuous learning activities. In addition, it has extended its definition of curriculum offerings beyond credit-based courses to include competencies and work experience, and credentials beyond degrees to encompass badges and certificates.

Oracle envisions Student Management as an easy way to introduce alternative forms of education to an institution or improve the ways in which these other learning models are managed. While continuing education is the first business model that Student Management addresses, Oracle intends to roll out additional functionality to support all educational models in future renditions. For the present, institutions will be able to integrate Student Management alongside Campus Solutions or any other SIS to buttress their growing student population and its diverse needs. Thanks to its adaptive intelligence capabilities, Student Management can even act as an early alert system for advisors to notify them of students' potential risk factors (such as college readiness, attendance, and class

engagement), thus reducing the need for remediation later while improving students' ability to achieve success within the institution.

Machine learning and adaptive intelligence drive student success

This period of higher education is one of uncertain potential, with institutions and their students often unsure of their journeys ahead. Many constituents admit to feeling unsupported or overwhelmed; they are unsure of what classes to take, what the path to completion looks like, or even what kind of educational model they should follow. While institutions want their students to succeed and flourish, it can be difficult, due to personnel, time, and budgetary constraints, for teachers, administration, and advisors to fully support each student on his or her educational journey. As a result, retention rates, institutions' reputational standing, and performance-based funding can rapidly decline.

While the term "student success" has become an increasingly popular topic of conversation in the higher education space, it often seems so broad as to become almost meaningless. However, in addition to its CX solutions, such as Student Recruiting, Student Engagement, and Student Support, Oracle has created within Student Management a new conduit to effectively engineer student success; all of these solutions are founded on Oracle's technology stack and huge amounts of data to predict and analyze student behaviors. Oracle has dubbed this conduit "Luci," though she can be customized by each institution to represent its mascot or another avatar of its choice. Luci uses adaptive intelligence and machine learning capabilities to become both proactive and reactive in creating a personalized, supportive environment for students. For instance, she can answer questions via chat or text, auto-enroll students during registration, and automatically build a schedule based on time constraints, major requirements, fulfilled credits, and other factors.

All institutions could benefit from Luci's capabilities, but she perhaps promises the most value for those institutions with extremely high advisor-to-student ratios, such as large state schools or community colleges. Luci can free the advisor from mundane tasks – answering questions about curriculum offerings or major requirements – to provide more focused, higher-level interactions with the students who need the assistance. With Luci, Oracle is expanding the ways in which institutions can enable further personalization in the student learning environment and increase efficiency in their business processes.

Institutions must invest in next-gen SISs to meet students' needs

As Ovum has previously demonstrated, students fully expect their experience with educational technology to match their experience with consumer technology. Institutions that do not have an architecture that supports adopting new technologies such as Luci or AI are at a significant disadvantage in relation to those utilizing the most modern solutions. Institutions that can distinguish themselves from their competitors and demonstrate the individualized experience they themselves can provide students are the ones that will survive this period of disruption in the higher education space; technology is a major contributor to that differentiation. Student Management provides an intuitive, mobile-friendly experience that technologically savvy students and users will appreciate, while its cloud-native nature enables institutions to achieve agility and scalability. Investing in an SIS can be a costly endeavor, so the buyer needs to ensure that this mission-critical solution can support not only the institution's current needs but also its future aspirations and goals.

Institutions interested in improving retention rates, student engagement levels, and more should consider adopting student success solutions with built-in analytics and machine learning to make the most intelligent data-driven insights and recommendations for students and staff. Students envision education as a means to establish a career; similarly, Oracle sees its new offerings as the means to support the student throughout and beyond his or her lifecycle in the institution. It must of course be acknowledged that many competitors have already ventured into the student success space, and some are equipped with similar machine-learning, predictive capabilities. However, given the breadth of Oracle's influence and technological capabilities, it is clear that Oracle Student Cloud will be a major player in this field.

Oracle is ultimately enabling institutions to expand their institutional and pedagogical missions while providing the most micro-personalized support that each student needs to succeed, in whichever way is the most effective for him or her. Though its professed motto of "anticipate the need; illuminate the path; empower students to succeed" is an ambitious one, Oracle is delivering on the promise of its Student Cloud and best-of-breed technologies to drive innovation in the higher education space.

Appendix

Further reading

"Oracle advances its cloud story in higher education," IT0008-000281 (October 2016)

SWOT Assessment: Oracle for Student Success, IT0008-000293 (December 2016)

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