



Measuring the Impact of Financial Aid and Student Support Services on Course Registration at Walden University

WALDEN
UNIVERSITY

An early pioneer in distance education, Walden University was established in 1970 to make advanced degrees more accessible to nontraditional learners. Today, Walden continues that mission with online programs designed for adults and others who need a flexible path to a high-quality education. Approximately 48,000 students are currently enrolled in the university's 80+ online bachelor's, master's, doctoral, and certificate programs.

Helping Students Overcome Barriers to Their Education

For many students today, financial aid is the most important factor to educational success and completing a degree. If a student with a potential financial aid obstacle can't find help or be directed toward a solution, they may risk attrition.

This critical issue surfaced at Walden in 2019 when support staff were struggling to keep up with an influx of financial aid calls and chats, resulting in long hold times for students and overtaxing agents. Recognizing the broader implications of providing students with fast and easy access to financial aid support, Walden leaders made the strategic decision to enlist Blackboard's [One Stop](#) services to supplement the university's in-house team.

With the partnership, Blackboard would provide Walden students with 24/7 financial aid support via phone, online self-service, and mobile apps. (Around-the-clock availability was particularly important for Walden's large student body of working professionals who need service access during nonconventional hours.)



GOALS

Walden University ▲
Graduation ceremony

Blackboard and Walden leaders hypothesized that by making it easier to access financial aid information and assistance, Blackboard One Stop would enable students to register for their courses unencumbered by financial aid holdups.

Therefore, in addition to improving standard operational-level call center metrics such as average hold time, average speed to answer, etc., goals included:

- 🎯 Measure the impact of the Blackboard service on term-to-term retention against a control group of financial aid inquiries handled by Walden staff.
- 🎯 Expand coverage for financial aid support inquiries to meet growing student demand.
- 🎯 Increase the number of resolutions to potential barriers, such as finance-related holds, that might otherwise prevent a student from registering for the following term.

APPROACH

Between 2019 and August 2020, Blackboard fielded more than 141,000 financial aid support calls from 60% of the student body. Next-term course registration rates were then tracked across the 60% of students who interacted with Blackboard versus the 40% of students with no Blackboard interaction. Additional data analysis was performed to better understand the impact of Blackboard services by degree level, registration account holds, student GPA, and other factors.



RESULTS

The term-to-term retention rate for students who interacted with Blackboard was 26% higher than the comparison group.

Additional analysis revealed:

- ☀ Blackboard-handled students registered for courses at higher rates across every program level: doctoral (27%), master's (26%), and undergraduate (26%).
- ☀ Students supported by Blackboard registered for courses at higher rates across all GPA bands. The greatest difference was in students with a 2.0 GPA, who registered at a rate nearly 73% higher than the comparison group. Students with a 2.5 GPA registered at a rate 53% higher than the comparison group and students with a 3.0 GPA registered at a 48% higher rate.
- ☀ Students with one or more financial holds on their account were 31% more likely to register for the next term if engaged by Blackboard than the control group.
- ☀ Of the colleges within Walden, the College of Health Sciences had the greatest differential between Blackboard handled and non-handled students with a 32% difference, followed by the College of Social and Behavioral Science (28%) and the College of Nursing (26%).

Summary

Blackboard and Walden successfully partnered to better serve students who might otherwise have been at risk for attrition due to financial aid support problems. Blackboard One Stop services resulted in a term-to-term retention rate for students who interacted with Blackboard that was 26% higher than the comparison group, providing Walden with valuable quantitative and qualitative data to help drive future student success efforts.

Provide students with accessible and comprehensive support to help them persist and succeed. Learn more about Blackboard's One Stop solutions.

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