

DePaul's Use of Non-Cognitive Variables in the Admission Process

Value, Impact & Implications

Panel Discussion , AIR Forum, Long Beach, CA 2013

60 minute Panel Timeline – Part I

- **Non-Cognitive Measurement in Admissions: Value, Impact, and Implications** An extensive body of literature examines the predictive power of non-cognitive characteristics and their impact on educational outcomes. The validity and reliability of such measures continues to be widely debated as numerous colleges and universities look to implement these nontraditional indicators to support complex institutional missions. This panel session includes three professionals with recent experience in the development and assessment of admissions models that incorporate non-cognitive measurement. Participants gain insight into the value of non-cognitive assessment, its impact on admissions and student success, and its future role at these institutions.
- **Part I: Introduction of panel and topic (Gerry - 5 minutes)** Ross Griffith is the Director of Institutional Research and Academic Administration at Wake Forest University.
- Susan Stachler is an Associate Director of Institutional Research & Market Analytics at DePaul University.
- Jacqui McLaughlin is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of North Carolina Eshelman School of Pharmacy, where she recently accepted a position as Associate Director of Strategic Planning and Assessment and Assistant Professor of Educational Innovation & Research.

60 minute Panel Timeline – Part II – Part V

- Part II: Institutional context (15-20 minutes) Each panelist spends 5-6 minutes talking about:
 - What problem(s) in the admissions process was identified at the institution
 - why did the institution believed non-cognitive assessment could address that problem
 - How is the institution using non-cognitive measurement to address the problem
- Part III: Panelist discussion (10-15 minutes) The moderator asks 3 questions for each panelist to answer in a discussion format (short answers 1-2 minutes each):
 - what is the biggest challenge your institution faced or is facing in the assessment of non-cognitive attributes?
 - What are the lessons learned to-date (from experience and/or research results)?
 - What are the next steps for your institution in this area?
- Part IV: Audience questions (15-20 minutes)
- Part V: Conclusion (3-5 minutes minutes) Panelists have 1 minute each to provide key points for those thinking about using or who are currently using non-cognitive measures

What problem(s) in the admissions process was identified at DePaul?

- From its mission statement, DePaul is committed to the education of first generation, low-income college students- especially those from the diverse cultural and ethnic groups in the metropolitan area around Chicago.
- DePaul's admission process had always been heavily weighted toward GPA and ACT. When our strategic plan included broadening its base of students – attracting them from a wider geographic area, it saw increasing demand. It became increasingly diverse in its racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic mix. And while it was used to just growing the class to accommodate increasing numbers, it noticed that with the growing numbers, it sometimes saw decreasing percentages of the students who are important to the mission of DePaul: first generation, low income.
- That is because much of the new demand it was seeing was among highly qualified students – the mean composite ACT of applicants had increased over a three year period (2005-2007) after several years of little change.
- Then its strategic plan called for it to cap the freshman class due to capacity issues and revenue streams and it found itself in a position of being more selective.
- It was also concerned about first generation students and Pell Grant eligible students because those segments included a higher percentage of minority students, and they tended to have lower ACT scores (between 2000-2006, 40% of black students were first generation, 62% of Latinos were first generation and 51% of Latinos were Pell eligible for the same period).

What were the challenges?

- How to manage increased selectivity without losing ground on DePaul's mission-based goals for access and diversity
- Finding a way to remove barriers associated with the more traditional measures, such as standardized testing

Why did DePaul believe a non-cognitive assessment could address the problems/challenges?

- DePaul believed it would work because it did a lot of research on the topic and looked toward experts in the field for answers. Under the direction of David Kalsbeek, senior vice president of the Division of Enrollment Management and Marketing, the division began having conversations with Dr. William Sedlacek, author of “Beyond the Big Test”, non-cognitive assessment in higher education (2004).
- The department of Enrollment Management and Marketing reviewed the results of Dr. Sedlacek’s research that spanned decades and learned how non-cognitive variables have been used as a supplement to standardized quantitative and verbal assessments such as ACT and SAT scores. University of Oregon’s experience with non-cognitive variables was also reviewed, as well as that of other institutions and organizations (Gates Foundation, Washington State Achievers Program).
- Dr. Sedlacek and members of the University of Oregon visited the DePaul campus to discuss how non-cognitive variables might fit into DePaul’s admissions process.
- After looking at experiential and contextual intelligence, it was decided that using non-cognitive variables would work because it would offer reasons to admit, not reasons to deny. It was hoped that it would help the admissions team to better select students who are likely to succeed. And finally, it would fit with DePaul’s holistic review process.

How is DePaul using non-cognitive measurements to address the problem and how has it changed since it was first implemented?

- **2009:** How we use it now differs from the way it began in 2009. It has been a process. When the essays were first implemented in 2009, they replaced essay questions on the freshman application. That year, there were about 10,000 ratings called DIAMOND scores (**D**eveloping **I**nsights for **A**dmission through the **M**ining of **N**on-traditional **D**ata) from the applicant pool.
- **2010:** The next year, the essays continued to be the primary essay questions and the process started out the same. However, due to a decline in applications and evidence that students were stopping at the essay portion of the application, the decision was made in January to remove the “required” status of the essays and allow students to complete their applications without writing the essays. That year, there were about 9,000 DIAMOND scores.
- **2011:** DePaul joined the Common Application which required that the essays directly match those used by the Common Application. A process was developed by which the essays were delivered to Early-Action (EAP) applicants who were deferred regular admission. That year, there were about 400 DIAMOND scores.
- **2012:** DePaul launched a Test-Optional Admission Pilot Program and also continued its membership in the Common Application. All students applying as part of the Test-Optional Admission Pilot Program were required to submit responses to the DIAMOND essays. At that point, essays continued to be used for the EAP applicants who were deferred. That year, there were 1,200 DIAMOND scores.

What was the biggest challenge DePaul faced in the assessment of non-cognitive attributes?

The greatest challenge initially, was the technological resources required for developing a system to manage the collection, review, and rating of the DIAMOND essays. IS had to build a tool to manage the entire process. That process was operational by Fall 2008. The process is designed so essay questions are viewable to the student as a section within the app for freshman admission. Students insert responses into text boxes within the app and submit the entire app with one click. Once submitted, the essays are available to view through a link within DePaul's secure portal which is accessible by approved readers and staff. The reader view is a blind process, no identifying information about the student is included. The system automatically assesses which essay is next in line to be reviewed and loads that essay into the reader view. Each essay is read by a minimum of two readers. If the score differs by more than four points, the essay goes to a third reader. The scores are then saved and stored within PeopleSoft to be viewed by the admissions staff.

What are the lessons learned to date from research?

- **Research on total DIAMOND score:** Preliminary results from the 2009 cohort showed the total DIAMOND score strongly influences students:
 - Earning a first year GPA of ≥ 2.5
 - Being retained the first year
 - Being retained the second year
 - Scores also influenced reaching the criteria for 2-year success (GPA ≥ 2.5 and earned credit hours ≥ 96)
 - The total DIAMOND score also shows Pell Grant eligible males were more likely to earn ≥ 48 credit hours their first year.
- **Research on Individual Dimensions of DIAMOND scores:** Preliminary results from the 2009 cohort showed some individual dimensions were also strong influencers for success:
 - “Knowledge in a Field” was a strong influencer for meeting both first and second year success criteria. This was also true for Pell Grant Eligible males (GPA of ≥ 2.5 and credit hours earned of ≥ 96).
 - “Leadership Experience” was predictive across six measures of success meaning its predictive value holds up beyond first year grades or other measures of first year success.

What are the lessons learned to date from experience?

- The admissions team finds it useful for the bottom 20% of the applicant pool. They use DIAMOND scores to carefully evaluate minority students with low HSGPAs and high DIAMOND scores. HSGPA is the most significant driver for predicting DePaul's students' first year success (GPA ≥ 2.5 and 1st year credit hours earned ≥ 48).
- Admissions looks at students from high schools with lower academic rigor who scored high on DIAMOND essays.
- Admissions also finds it useful for evaluating students from Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

What are the next steps for DePaul in this area?

- As analysis of Federal Pell Grant eligible males indicated, there are subgroups of students for which the DIAMOND scoring might prove beneficial. DePaul intends to continue research into that – for there is subtlety in the data. Some of the future research will be based on the recent changes within the admission program. For example, a test-optional pilot program that was launched required all students who applied as test-optional to complete the DIAMOND essays. This small group will be analyzed as well as test-submitters with HSGPAs that are high in comparison to their ACT scores.
- Now, for the first time, DePaul's DIAMOND essays have been used the same way for two years in a row. That will provide Institutional Research with additional analysis opportunities.
- Finally, DePaul will continue to analyze the 2009 cohort. This year, it will be able to look at four year graduation rates. Enrollment, Management and Marketing is excited about this since it has already seen that DIAMOND scores appear to be predictive of success beyond the first year.

Key Points

- For those who are considering this process, craft your non-cognitive variables and scoring rubric based on the extensive research of experts like William Sedlacek and Robert Sternberg who believe that traditional measures only account for some of the difference in academic performance.
- Involve an analyst or two from the beginning, There is richness in this type of data and the more the analyst understands the data, the better. The scores might be most meaningful to small segments and that can be the most important lesson to learn above all. Changing the direction of even one student, often means changing the direction of an entire family for generations to come.

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