

# CREATING A CULTURE OF DATA USE:

## A CASE STUDY ON THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

An institution's culture of data use shapes its efforts to improve student outcomes, from enrollment to completion and post-college earnings. When campus stakeholders have access to timely and sophisticated data on student outcomes, they're empowered to make student-centered and data-driven decisions. When those data are disaggregated by race and ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic, parental, or first-generation status, campus stakeholders are equipped to translate data into targeted interventions.

The University of North Texas (UNT) is a four-year public Hispanic-Serving Institution located in Denton, Texas. In 2018, UNT launched the *Insights* data platform. This user-friendly platform gives faculty, staff, and campus leadership access to disaggregated data on enrollment, admissions, grades, financial aid, retention, and completion. Data from the platform are used to inform decisions about how to best support the success of UNT students. Between 2016 and 2021, UNT's completion rate increased by seven percentage points. The typical UNT student earns approximately \$58,000 a year ten years after initially enrolling, placing them well above the 60th percentile of earnings for prime-age workers in Texas.

Informed by interviews with administrators, faculty, and students, this case study offers a step-by-step account of UNT's effort to create a data infrastructure that breaks down data silos to empower all stakeholders on campus to make data-driven decisions. By implementing the strategies highlighted in this case study to foster a culture of data use, institutions can offer postsecondary value to all students.

UNT was identified for this case study through an analysis of data from the [Equitable Value Explorer](#), an interactive data visualization tool that allows users to compare post-college earnings outcomes at more than 4,000 colleges and universities. Learn more and explore the tool at [equity.postsecondaryvalue.org](https://equity.postsecondaryvalue.org)



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USING DATA TO ADVANCE EQUITABLE POSTSECONDARY VALUE ON YOUR CAMPUS

## 1. Use disaggregated data to inform equitable decision-making.

Disaggregating measures of student outcomes by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic, parental, or first-generation status, can reveal inequities and opportunities to make policy and practice changes that support all students' success. UNT's data system gives stakeholders across campus access to such data, facilitating timely data-informed decisions about how to best serve students. With policies and interventions informed by this data, UNT increased completion rates among Latinx students from 50 to 57 percent in five years.

## 2. Consider everyone on campus a data user—and design data systems to meet their needs.

Creating a campus-wide culture of using data to make timely and informed decisions requires data systems that meet the day-to-day needs of faculty, staff, and administrators. By engaging campus data users early in the process and before selecting a software provider, UNT ensured their data system met stakeholders' needs. The platform now consists of more than 25 data dashboards that allow users to access analytics about enrollment, admissions, grades, financial aid, student demographics, retention, and completion.

## 3. Invest in culture as well as data tools and systems.

Data tools are just that—tools individuals must wield effectively to produce equitable student outcomes. UNT ensures stakeholders across campus have the training, capacity, and support to use data to make informed and student-centered decisions on a daily basis. As of 2023, there were over 1,200 trained campus users, greatly increasing the institution's return on investment. Transforming a campus culture is slow and challenging work that requires committed leadership as well as investments of time, staff capacity, and money, but it is essential for institutions seeking to equitably deliver postsecondary value.

Ultimately, enabling a more robust use of data across campus has allowed UNT to make timely and informed decisions about how to promote postsecondary value for students from all backgrounds. Institutional leaders, faculty, and staff at all levels benefit from access to relevant, disaggregated data on student outcomes. Data literacy and institution support help those stakeholders translate data into measurable improvements in student outcomes. By following the example of UNT, more institutions can develop a culture of data use that drives improvements in outcomes for all students.



“The data is just data; that's not going to change your institutional outcomes...it's having literacy around the data. It's having people all know how to understand what data means.”

— Jason Simon, Associate Vice President for Data Analytics and Institutional Research

*This case study is part of a series on Minority-Serving Institutions. Read [Believing in The Potential of Every Student: A Case Study on LaGuardia Community College](#) and [Student Success is the DNA of NAU: A Case Study on Northern Arizona University](#) for more recommendations to advance postsecondary value.*

*Photos courtesy of The University of North Texas*