

Katy Oliveira (00:00):

Welcome to Next Practices. Today we're talking about our annual flagship research report, the Student Impact Report, which explores which student success initiatives are positively influencing persistence outcomes at civic trust learning customer institutions. But before we dive into that conversation, take a moment to subscribe to the show to stay up to date on the latest in data formed Approaches to Student Impact. Today you can see I'm joined by several of my colleagues, which I'm really excited for them to join me today to share some of the takeaways from this year's report and talk through some ways your institution can use regular initiative assessment to enhance your student success effort. Thank you for joining everyone.

Robert Freidhoff (00:52):

Thank you for having us. Hello.

Katy Oliveira (00:54):

Let's start by having each of you introduce yourself. I'd love for you to share about your background in higher ed. The great thing here at CITAs Learning is we have a really robust team of former higher ed professionals and also the work that you're doing at CITAs Learning Nova, let's start with you. Sure.

Nova Davidson (01:13):

Hi everyone. I'm Nova Davidson. I started my higher ed journey about 20 years ago in enrollment management and admissions, and I wanted your first year programs and then my previous role right before going to Tougher nine years ago with many large advising team. So really excited to have been working with our schools for the last nine years at Civic Cost using a variety of our tools, really from a strategy perspective. So excited to be during the conversation today.

Katy Oliveira (01:43):

Thanks Nova. And Rob, do you mind introducing yourself?

Robert Freidhoff (01:47):

Yeah, absolutely. Katie, thank you for the invite back. I think this is three years in a row. I get to be on podcast, so super excited to be back like Nova. I was about 20 years on campus, often say I grew up in the advising world, and so my first job on a campus, I was a pre-med advisor, shout out to Grand Valley State. That's where I did that for about six or seven years, and then moved into the administration side of academic advising a little bit at Grand Valley and then moved over to the University of Michigan, LED advising teams there in their college of engineering. And then my last role on campus was at a regional comprehensive in the state of Georgia. Vedo State. Started with a reorg in advising, but then finished up there as an A VP for student success. We were partners with CITAs Learning, and so got to

know CITAs, joined the team just about three years ago and have been on the success strategy side of the house during that time and am a senior director for customer development.

Katy Oliveira (02:40):

Nathan, last but not least, do you mind introducing yourself to everyone?

Nathan Miller (02:44):

Don't mind at all. Hello, my name is Nathan. I've been with CITAs Learning for just a little over a year at this point with the customer development team. Before that time, I spent just over 15 years in higher education on the institution side in a number of different roles in online education, enrollment management, financial aid, extended learning degree completion for adult students, post-secondary degree completion programs and course design and curriculum design. So like I said, been here for about a year and really enjoy my role in having a chance to get to work with all of our great partner schools.

Katy Oliveira (03:21):

Well, this should be a really good conversation. I think between the four of us, we're collectively pushing 75 years of higher ed experience primarily in advising, so that's pretty amazing. I got little.

Robert Freidhoff (03:33):

Yeah, that's wild.

Katy Oliveira (03:35):

Well, so just to set the stage for folks who aren't familiar with our Student Success Impact report, we've been analyzing the impact of initiatives on student success for quite some time. Those of you who've worked with success learning for a long time might remember we had a report called our Community Insights Report, which has over time evolved into our current iteration, which is the Student Success Impact report. This is the third year of releasing that iteration of the report. Our older version would narrow in more on specific findings where the current report is a broader look across everything that's getting evaluated over the course of those years of analysis, we've seen a really consistent trend that about 40 to 60% of initiatives significantly impact key outcomes, which means there are a significant number of initiatives that don't necessarily impact. They may have a neutral impact or in some cases even a negative impact on student outcomes, which can lead to a disconnect, a lot of institutions between their effort and their investment in those initiatives and the results that they're ultimately seeing. So with that in mind, what are some of the key ways you're seeing our customers use initiative analysis to inform and improve student success initiatives at their institutions? And I'd like to start at a high level and over the course of our conversation, we'll get a little bit more granular about the how and the what

and the why of it all. But Nova, do you mind kicking things off? You're the first person I see in my list here.

Nova Davidson (05:20):

Sure. So the schools that we work with, leveraging the data to really understand their programs and what is working and for whom in the report, we talk about segmentation and that's been key to what our schools are using to identify, hey, our outreach team or our advisors can really focus their work with the bottom core tile, or these students are leveraging this. So really managing resources. The schools that have been most successful with using the platform, they use it in an iterative manner. So we're going to measure fall this year, spring, and then we're going to go back in a year. So it's a process where they're always looking at these and maybe doing a few things at a time and building upon that. So not having to measure everything, but a couple of things. And I think the biggest thing that they can do is just understand your program, using it to understand the programs, what the programs are. Some schools aren't really thinking about all the services they have, so this platform helps them think through that, Hey, we want to measure these things, but we have to know what they are first. But that's really the first conversation that we have with our school, just understanding what the programs are, who they work for, and then having that broader conversation about student success and across the entire institution at a high level.

Katy Oliveira (06:56):

Yeah, and I think that inventorying of what we actually have, because there's lots of pockets across institution that may not be talking to each other, maybe doing similar work can be really helpful. Rob, and then Nathan, if you have anything to add.

Robert Freidhoff (07:12):

Yeah, I think for me, the reality is I was often asked on campus, Hey, we just had increases in persistence or we just had increases in retention. What was it? And I remember 10 years ago being like, well, we've done all of these different things. I'm not exactly sure which piece of this is contributing to that persistence or that retention. And so I think when I'm having these conversations with partners of mine, it's are you getting questions like that? And if you are getting questions like that, we can utilize information from within this part of our product to be able to say, Hey, we know that when we segmented by the very low likelihood or the low likelihood to persist, and we focused in on ensuring that more of those students came into appointments than have ever before we saw a positive take. And so for me, it's helping people understand that what are we trying to do?

(08:04):

How can we leverage what we have here so that you can tell your story on the campus about what's working. And Nova said this too earlier, but what's working and who's it working for? So understanding the different segments within the student body and then ultimately making sure we're being wise with how we utilize resources, right? If 40 to 60%

the comment you made earlier, I don't want to, as an administrator, continue to spend resources, time, effort, and energy if there's not a return. So sometimes one of the things that is the hardest to do is to stop doing the things you put into flight. It's easier to do that though when you know that those aren't having the results that you want and you can spend that time and effort and energy in a space where you're getting an impact that is beneficial.

Katy Oliveira (08:45):

In an earlier episode, episode 25, we speak with Kevin mc, mines of Greenville Technical College, and he actually listen into that episode if you haven't already, actually does a cross analysis of impact and ROI and to see dollar amounts of the impact on student retention across their initiatives. That's really powerful. And he walks through how to do that, and that can be really helpful way to look at it too. So if you're listening, that's a good resource. Nathan, what do you think? What are you seeing?

Nathan Miller (09:20):

Yeah, so Rob really keyed in on one of the points that I wanted to bring up, and that's that 40 to 60% having sat in those seats and been responsible for programming before and knowing that something's working, but I can't put my finger on it, so I just got to keep doing all the things because if I stop, I don't know if I'm going to stop doing the thing that's working. So having the ability to assess a program and the outcomes at the program level to say, yes, this is having an impact or the intended impact, and then to better understand for whom. So we can assess, reassess, redesign, redeploy, and get the support where it's needed with the student population. And for me, a lot of it too is building that culture of assessment around programming. That could be a big step for institutions.

(10:10):

It has been with institutions I worked for in the past or even within a department or within a division, but really building some teams around looking at data and being open and transparent and critical about the efforts that you're taking. Critical, not in a negative sense, but critical in a is this working? We're all working with limited resources, whether it be staff or budget or time. So we need to be able to allot those resources in the best manner possible. And tools like this help us make those decisions and we'll say data informed, right? Data informed decisions, not data decided, not data driven, but data informed. What does the data tell us and how is that going to help direct our efforts moving forward

Katy Oliveira (10:56):

About that data-informed versus data-driven even. We're not a hundred percent, but I try to be really mindful of that distinction and our content and wherever we can, wherever I catch it when I'm reviewing content, it's center on data informed because it's inputs into your decision making and into your conclusion drawing on the institution. For sure. Rob, thank

you. What was that other, I would love to hear that other point.

Robert Freidhoff (11:24):

Yeah, I was just thinking from the high level that we're starting with here and it's being able to celebrate wins too. The work that's being done on campus right now, it's just hard work. People spend a lot of time, effort, energy pouring their souls into this work, and I think one of the things that is helpful is when we're able to say back to these teams that are putting in a lot of effort, Hey, by the way, this work that we're doing right here based on what we measured, is making a significant impact in the life of students. And think when we're able to do that, it puts wind in people's sails or gets people excited and gives them that kind of boost of energy that sometimes is really needed when you're slugging and you're working really hard to get those small percentage gains, but when we're able to bring it back and say, Hey, this work you're doing is positively impacting students can be really beneficial for helping staff see that value that they bring day in and day out.

Katy Oliveira (12:15):

Yeah, I think that's a really good point. I think we should celebrate and see what's working. And it can really be, I've heard from many of our customers in talking about successes that that can be a real boost for teams to know that the work that they're doing is making a difference. Because sometimes when you are slogging it day in and day out, not always, it's not always easy to see.

Nova Davidson (12:37):

Piggyback on that. So one of the things that schools have done really great results, but going into the segmentation and to wraps, celebrating the wins with specific population is a part of our strategic goal and important to our institution. But looking at those part-time students or students who have only completed two terms, we on their first two terms beating them to say, this is really working for this group of students where we really want it to work. And that's been really important for our schools as well.

Katy Oliveira (13:11):

Yeah, I think sometimes we look at the big holistic overall outcomes, but those outcomes are made up of smaller incremental gains over time, and I think that's a really, really important point. Some findings from this year's report highlights the importance of holistically supporting students throughout their experience. That's really the big theme from our findings. It's thinking about how to support students in ways that are proactive and individualized. Some of the findings are things like students really thrive when they can have a seamless registration, planning, registration, scheduling experience all in one place, or they thrive when they feel like they are belonging and they have access to non-academic resources or when nudges work, but they're more powerful when they're personalized. And

we actually even found that this is very directional. We only had one or two institutions measure this. So this is absolutely not a widespread research-based trend.

(14:17):

This is a trend that we're seeing emerge from our customers. But the AI chatbots had in some cases a negative influence. And our trend that we see consistently across different forms of automated outreach over the course of all of our impact reports over time is that that automated outreach can feel really impersonal and can actually be counterproductive sometimes as opposed to finding ways to scale more personalized and individualized communications. So with those things in mind, what are the kinds of services and programs and initiatives listeners might be sleeping on or not thinking about when it comes to evaluating impact? Where are you seeing opportunities to think outside of the box and start to really measure things kind of beyond those tried and true things? We think of top of mind like tutoring or or advising.

Robert Freidhoff (15:15):

I think if we think about themes in higher education in general, the career and career outcome side is becoming more and more important with the partners that we talk to. I think some of that is just the current landscape that we find ourselves in and the reality of economics and different things like that. But I think that there's a lot of opportunity to consider how do the interactions that students have with career services, career centers on campuses impact that journey along the way. And one of the themes that came out of the study, one of the words that hit me quite a bit was this concept of connectedness, and I'm going to get myself in trouble, but I'm a former higher education person, so I'm going to say this, which is rarely do you hear in the world of higher education that it's super easy to navigate higher ed.

(16:01):

That's not something that's typically there. What you instead often hear is it's very hard at times for students to be able to move within the higher education sphere and get everything that they need. And I think connectedness could be to an office, but I think our partners that are really thinking about how to best support student success are thinking about how do they become a connected campus so that when a student shows up and advising and then goes to the career center and then also has tutoring, all of that is captured. And so kind of a long-winded answer there, but career and how that impacts, but also that connectedness, so that success coach, that academic advisor, even the faculty member maybe understands and knows that that person has utilized the career center and what they went to talk about so that they can help support that work of that office.

Nathan Miller (16:45):

I'll pick up there just a little bit. And the thoughts of connectedness and the student experiences, and this, it plays into some of the findings as well. It's just that streamlined student experience and being connected across the institution. To Rob's point, no student

comes to higher school. Well, absolutes don't use absolutes, but I would be surprised to find a student who came to school for the registration process or for those types of things. So being able to connect the student across the resources to take down those business process barriers, right? Take down the business process barriers, and let's get to why you are here and what you're here for at school. Open up those opportunities for the student to get connected across the institution on something other than I need a course waiver or something other than I need to get my financial aid figured out. And let's open up and have that discussion a little bit broader in that sense.

Katy Oliveira (17:47):

Nova, did you have something to add there?

Nova Davidson (17:50):

Yeah, I do. Just thank you, Katie. One of the things that is really important for some of our schools are looking at different outcomes that we're able to measure. For example, working with one institution, we're thriving in career readiness or each with their mission and their featured forward. So being able to use the impact analysis that we provide to measure career readiness outcomes or in addition to persistence completion within a timeframe or thriving, that's been a conversation about where is that data? Who owns those programs? And if we're not keeping that data, how do we start keeping that data so we can measure it? So thinking beyond to your point of some of the tried and true, but what are the other divisions if you're working on success programs, but that lead to completion or thriving or career readiness that we're able to measure?

Robert Freidhoff (18:45):

I love

Nova Davidson (18:46):

Thinking broader

Robert Freidhoff (18:47):

Student affairs don't sleep on student affairs and the divisions that are in student affairs, right, is like we do a lot of academic advising, tutoring, stuff that's happening within the classroom, all very important. But when we start to think about belonging, what does it look like when somebody's showing up to be in an intramural program or a co-ed or what are those called? Not varsity sports, but between intramurals and varsity sports, a club, club sports, and how does that impact the student journey and that belongingness on campus or mentorship programs that you have throughout the campus leadership programs that you have throughout the campus folks and student government association. So I think our friends on the student affairs side, there's a lot of opportunity for them to see very directly the impact that these programs are having on student success on the campus.

Nathan Miller (19:33):

I was going to speak towards using the data a little bit more in that discovery process and what we were talking about the data informed process. So the observations in the report about connectedness and about the communication and financial aid gaps is understanding the data in the sense of who is actually being impacted by this. We all have good ideas about who this may be on campus, but sometimes these data dies will allow us to uncover student subpopulations that we maybe weren't necessarily aware of that really needed support. So one I like to highlight often when I'm talking with institutions is cumulative. GPA. Yeah, big surprise. Cumulative GPA is an indicator of persistence, but what is that tipping point on your campus? And it tends to be a little bit higher than folks think, right? Because we'll often kind of gravitate towards that 2.0. We have a lot of signals in systems generally where the students who are nearing that, whether it be academic probation or SAP for financial aid, a number of things that will kind of throw flags up on for students and typically the tipping point's a little bit higher. So using that type of information to gauge, okay, we understand we need personalized outreach, but who and on what action items should we be making that outreach? What's your plan for your 2.5 to your 3.0 students that are not on anybody's radar getting a couple a's a B and a couple, they seem to be doing well and really being able to key in on that information to help drive those decisions.

Katy Oliveira (21:20):

Yeah, it's getting to those finer level details and really see what's going on across different and not painting with a broad brush and hoping for the best. Right. Well, let's talk more specifically about how you might start this kind of evaluation, how you, clearly this is part of what you're able to accomplish with CITAs Learning Student Impact platform, but what are some best practices or things to keep in mind when looking to start measuring the impact on your programs? And for those of you who are listening who may not have access to our platform, if you are interested in learning more, you can go to our website, CITAs learning.com and fill it out. Contact us form and we'll be happy to talk to you about how this could look on your campus. But let's just talk about orient people in the process of setting up themselves for success when it comes to evaluating things in this way.

Nova Davidson (22:13):

One of the things that Katie mentioned earlier is the inventory of services. So starting point is having the conversation about what programs do you have that can be measured and making sure this is a conversation across team institutional research, the data people, student success, academics, what could you measure? What are the programs that you have? We have resources to share with you that you can start an inventory, but just what you have, who owns it? Who's it for? How do they hear about it? What is the intent of the program? How long have you had the data? The tool itself is very simple in terms of the data that you need, but the larger conversation is had at campuses around what's going on here. And you'd be surprised how many services and initiatives that schools have that they may not even realize. So what I have seen is there may be tutoring in a college of business,

but also tutoring for athletics or for an institute services division. So having that conversation to understand and then that is the first place, and making sure that people feel comfortable. This is not punitive. It's all meant to support student success and completion and for readiness. So that very holistic conversation about, Hey, we just want to measure to help and know what's working. But that is critical and key. So starting there is actually, I think my recommendation where we've seen the most success.

Katy Oliveira (23:54):

We do have some resources to help with that inventory, so we'll link to those in our show notes. If you're interested in downloading, we have a little worksheet that you can use to get started there. Rob, Nathan.

Robert Freidhoff (24:08):

Yeah. I think the space that my brain tends to go to is into the what do I have to report out on? What are these things that I need to do either internally for my division or maybe that are kind of whole campus kind of initiatives that I know I'm going to be standing in front of a group of people and having some data informed work that we've done can be really useful. Back in the day when I was in the state of Georgia, we have a very connected system in the state of Georgia and going up into the university system and having conversations and giving reports, and then even thinking about accrediting bodies that are coming in and they're asking questions. So what are those things that I'm being asked to report out on? And that'll be really useful for me to be able to go forward with and say, Hey, we put out there as part of our strategic plan, this goal to increase persistence for part-time students. And so we put together a program or we did this initiative or effort, and now we want to measure whether or not that actually had the intended consequence. So I think starting by thinking about what are these things that I have to do in my job already and then how can I leverage what's available to me inside of CITAs learning? That one is going to help me do the job, but also tell the story

Nathan Miller (25:25):

For me all the things my colleague said. Another aspect of it is the willingness to take action. Having conversations around that, the willingness to take action. We've all seen situations where there's paralysis by analysis or there's some data and everyone sits around and pokes at it with a pencil for a little bit, and then we kind of move on and do the things we've been doing. Where we see success is when people are being internally critical. Again, not in a negative sense, but critical in the sense of is this working and is it having the outcomes that we expect want or need? And if not, how can we adjust to reach the student populations that we need to reach the most? So there really needs to be a coalition of the willing to take that on. And if that's something you're building at your campus, start small.

(26:21):

I mean, start small, start with a thing, have commerce conversations around a thing. Start with something your department is doing. Hey, this is what we're doing. This is what we're seeing. These are the adjustments we would like to make to this programming. This is the type of support we need. Or just be aware that this may impact your area. In those sense is be first at the table to assess and redesign and redeploy and start building that trust across the institution. So as Nova mentioned, it's a tool and not a weapon, and it can be seen one way or the other depending on how it's presented or how it's approached by the institution or leadership.

Katy Oliveira (27:05):

Another area that I see people get hung up on just in general, I think when they're adopting or thinking about being able to engage with the analytics platform or having analytics or being able to measure or use data in their approach is the fear that my data is not ready for this. Our institution's not ready. Our data is not clean, it's disorganized, it's not accurate. I see this popping up over and over and over again as a theme. What would you say to people who have that maybe running through their mind right now

Nathan Miller (27:42):

For initiative analysis, we need three things. A student number, if they participated in a term, I mean as far as Nova said, it's data wise, what's needed is pretty minimal once the system is stood up. So it could be something, and we don't have to start collection. If you have the data there, it could be we recommend nothing typically older than two to four years just because there's changes in how students are navigating your system. But for this analysis, specifically what we're talking about, it's a pretty low lift as far as the amount of the data points needed to make it happen.

Nova Davidson (28:30):

To piggyback on what Nathan said, it doesn't hurt to run the data through. You can run a lot of reports. We say no more than a hundred a day, but you're not going to break anything. And it's important to understand where you start from because if you don't have enough data, that can be a conversation about how we keep the data going forward, and it doesn't hurt to see what the data say. One of the things that we're really careful about and cognizant of is informing our schools on how to message their readings out. Usually someone in institutional research would have assets working with their colleague who owned the program, but there's a part of interpretation that institutional research came to for their internal clients that's a part of this data. A second thing is, so some of our, you may say the program that we work with, we only have a hundred students who participated, but you can go back as long as four years and depending on a couple of different things, you may have four terms a year that you can measure. You may have more data than you think, I would say. And don't be afraid. We will walk with you to do the technical parts or think through what you can do, but the worst part is just getting over that first hurdle.

Katy Oliveira (30:06):

Yeah. Nova, one piece of advice I've heard you share pretty consistently when I observe you talking and interacting with our customers and talking about our customers is not only assessing and measuring and evaluating, which is where most of our conversation has been centered today, but thinking carefully about how you apply your findings and turn those findings into action that leaders and teams can take to impact their outcomes. Can you share some ways you recommend applying findings or turning these kinds of insights into action or some things maybe you've seen that work well? And of course, Nathan and Rob, if you have something to chime in, I'd love to hear that too. But I'll start with you, Nova.

Nova Davidson (30:54):

I think this goes back to the conversation we've had or I've said here that having a plan and walking across your institution is key to taking action. At the end of the day, everyone here to support student success and graduate student, but having a plan and some actions are very important. But talking, having that conversation across your team, one of the things that we have often observed is that many different teams across are doing outreach or success work. And when you have these results and you want to make sure that five different teams aren't going to action the data with the same students, so that conversation about action, who's taking the action and then measuring it a year later, a term later, what is working okay, this is really working. What shifted? And I think it's really important if we think about the current day, think the change in the last four years or two years. So go back and look at what worked before. Rerun that with current data to inform action, but it's understanding what is being done and how you can change it.

Katy Oliveira (32:08):

And I think that going back and measuring again, part is something that we don't think to do, but you want to see what is the shifts impact. You can see that if you're doing this irregular cadence as a cycle.

Nova Davidson (32:24):

I think the other part that I've seen really work is the more you run, the more you rely on the data to inform action, the more acting there will be to measure more students that you can measure these programs with. So it becomes easier. But always going back to this is where our plan is. This is going to be actioning the plan. This is going to be who measures it and just creating that culture and going back and doing that and expanding upon that. But it's really exciting to see when our schools have those successes and they shift and they come back and measure it in a year with that data. And it's really wonderful to see how excited they are about understanding their actions and strategizing to further reach the outcomes that they want using this tool.

Katy Oliveira (33:12):

Yeah. Nathan, Rob, anything else you want to add there? Cool. Well, before we sign off, I want to talk through any other lessons learned or tips that you have top of mind that we might've missed in the course of our conversation today.

Robert Freidhoff (33:35):

This connects a little bit to what we were just talking about, Katie, but I think if you're listening to us, you might have a stance of like, oh God, this is one other thing I need to do, or one more thing on a plate of activities that need to get done. But I think I would reframe that a little bit to this is work that you're likely already being asked to do. And so think a little bit about the committees or the structures or the different parts of the organization that are doing this work and then how that can help that. What we see a lot of is that there's some kind of a success council or some kind of enrollment management council or some group that is tasked to look at these kinds of things. And so being able to nest this work in something that already exists is a good way to help out a part of that institution that, again, has this task already and then it's not spinning up yet another committee.

(34:29):

It's taking this insight and helping a group of people to have a better understanding and to have some more levers to be able to pull on to try to hit those goals that you have at the institution. And so I think there can be that initial thought of like, oh, man, now I've got to figure out how to do that. And that again, that structure oftentimes already exists. So the right question I think to ask is, where would this work benefit an org or a part of an organization or a structure that we already have, and then leverage it within that environment.

Nova Davidson (35:00):

One of the other things that Nathan, Rob and I work on our customer development team, but we have a larger team and we're all here to support our customers and we're experts on our tools and in industry. So if you need help getting started, reach out to new director or reach out to us so we can walk you through and use this report to go through and look at all the initiatives may happen at your school. So use those resources that you have.

Katy Oliveira (35:31):

Thank you everyone for joining me today to talk about the Student Impact report and how people might apply these findings or do this kind of evaluation at their own institution. If you are interested in downloading the full report, you can do so by going to our show notes. We'll have a link to it there, or you can visit our website@citaslearning.com. Thanks everyone for coming on the show.

Robert Freidhoff (35:54):

Thanks, Katie. Thank you. Thank you.