Institutional Member Highlight

New York University and the Learning Analytics Research Network (LEARN)

At the March Institutional Briefing Meeting at the LAK conference, three institutional members, New York University, National University of Singapore, and Victoria University of Wellington were given the floor to present their learning analytics initiatives. The latter two universities are newcomers to SoLAR, whereas NYU joined in 2017. NYU and its Learning Analytics Research Network (LEARN) played an active role in supporting LASI in 2018 and will continue co-organising LASI in New York in 2020. NYU-LEARN is led by Dr Alyssa Wise who presented on the network and learning analytics at NYU.

Dr Wise described NYU’s learning analytics initiatives as a collaborative effort, focused on community change that puts people, not data, first. Among its key characteristics are:

- partnerships between IT, faculty, administrators and students;
- user-centred design involving stakeholders from the start;
- scalability to serve the largest private university in the United States with 10+ global campuses and international student body;
- research to innovate and build a knowledge base for data-informed teaching and learning in higher education.

The Learning Analytics Research Network (LEARN) coordinates research and practice at NYU to progress innovation at the cutting edge of learning analytics and build the future of data-informed teaching and learning research in higher education. By combining advanced data science methods with the careful design and implementation of novel learning approaches, LEARN supports NYU in becoming a living learning system and leader in data-informed teaching and learning while also generating impactful new knowledge about how analytics can promote equitable and effective education.

Currently NYU learning analytics offers three institution-wide services: instructional dashboard, data-on-request, and student-facing analytics.
Beyond simply offering such services, NYU-IT and LEARN collaborate to research their design, use and impact in order to develop an empirically grounded knowledge-base. In particular, in-depth case studies documenting instructors’ practices of dashboard use were used to produce a model of analytic sense-making and action. This model informed improvements to the dashboard itself and the development of ongoing scaffolds for instructors to integrate dashboard use into their teaching practices.

In addition to institution-wide projects, NYU is also developing localised projects driven by day-to-day teaching and learning needs with a strong research component. Among them are an initiative on predicting calculus success, a tool offering students’ feedback on presentation skills, and an effort to understand dental students’ development as professionals through their reflections. The predicting calculus success initiative detects students likely to struggle in calculus and offers them additional resources and early support. The presentation feedback tool provides students with information about their body position, gesture, gaze and speaking characteristics to help them improve their oral presentation skills. The dental reflection project combines text and network analytics to identify students’ shifts towards a patient-centred orientation.

For those new to the field of LA, a recent publication by Dr Wise (2019) offers an accessible overview, which can be useful to a range of stakeholders unfamiliar with the field. (Learning Analytics: Using Data-Informed Decision-Making to Improve Teaching and Learning.)

Would you like to present your learning analytics initiatives at the next Institutional Briefing Meeting in Frankfurt? Let us know at solarsocietymgmt@gmail.com