#NACADA16 Hot Topic Session: Ethics & Data Use in Advising

**Abstract:** Data analytics systems are being adopted by colleges and universities as a way to improve retention and graduation by providing advisors with important data at their fingertips. Data can be an important tool for advisors and may drive some decision making for advising administrators, but in what ways should those data inform day-to-day advising practice? When we have access to so much data, does it change conversations for better or worse? Join us for an interactive discussion about the ethical implications of data use.

**Objectives:** Participants will:
- Connect with colleagues to discuss ethical implications of data analytics systems
- Share best practices of ethical data use
- Consider how the adoption of a “big data” system may influence day-to-day advising practice
- Understand the full range of data sources being integrated into analytics systems

**Proposal:**

Colleges and universities are adopting data analytics systems as a way to manage, report on, and learn from the mass amounts of data available in higher education. Per Oblinger (2012), "A growing emphasis on institutional performance, including calls for cost containment and outcomes-based funding tied to measures of college completion, requires that institutions have the capacity to understand what drives not only their performance but also that of their students.” Some of this data is generated from student information systems, some is from learning management systems, and still others have to do with business practices at institutions. Data analytics systems provide a tool to help administrators, professors, advisors, and others answer questions that, without analytics, would otherwise be difficult to identify patterns or “see connections between different types of data” (Berman, 2013).

But just because we have access to these mass amounts of data and systems have developed to help us make sense of it, should we change our day-to-day advising practice? How do the values of academic advising, as defined by NACADA, inform the use of analytics systems to advise students? The introduction of these data analytics systems to higher education presents a number of ethical issues which must be considered.

During this presentation and discussion, some of the following questions will be addressed:
- What assumptions are made in the analysis of data in these mass systems which might “determine [or] limit how institutions behave toward and react to their students, both as individuals and as members of a number of different cohorts” (Slade and Prinsloo, 2013)?
● What right does a student have to maintain their individual identity within the data set and is it “appropriate for students to have an awareness of the labels attached to them? Are there some labels that should be prohibited” (Slade and Prinsloo, 2013)?

● How do students consent to the collection, use, and storage of data within the analytics system the institution is using (Slade and Prinsloo, 2013)? How and to whom do students raise concerns if they feel their institutional data has been misused (Oblinger, 2012)? Are students able to request that their data be deleted from the analytics system (Slade and Prinsloo, 2013)?

● What is the lifespan of longitudinal data in these systems? Should there be an expiration date where the data is no longer considered in the analysis (Slade and Prinsloo, 2013)? Trend data is also an important consideration to reflecting on institutional and departmental practices.

● Do data systems preemptively “police behaviors that may never occur, and in the process reshape how people act through self-disciplining” (Kitchin, 2014)?

● How do we talk to students about their level of “risk” as identified or defined by the data system? “Once something is known, what are the ethical ramifications of action or inaction” (Willis and Pistilli, 2014)?

● Who defines the questions and interprets the data output from these systems? Is there risk of analysis and interpretation of data “to support virtually any conclusion that suits your fancy” (Berman, 2013)?

● How are students given the opportunity “to prove the initial predictive analyses wrong or incomplete or to redeem themselves despite any initial institutional doubt regarding their potential” (Slade and Prinsloo, 2013)? How do these “rags-to-riches” narrative examples influence the data analysis?

Attendees will be seated in roundtables for the presentation and will have an opportunity to generate and discuss other questions they have around ethics and data analytics usage in advising.

References:


