

GEAR UP Student Tracking

Evaluating performance in educational programs



Challenge · Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) is a Department of Education grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. The program consists of various initiatives aimed at fostering more engaged, successful students.

GEAR UP administrators in Pennsylvania and Kentucky were challenged to determine the effectiveness of their respective programs. Which initiatives worked best? What improvements could be made? How did participants perform compared to non-participants? Furthermore, the grantees were required to prepare and submit a 33-page annual performance report as mandated by the U.S. Department of Education under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA).

SOLUTION · Xcalibur worked closely with state GEAR UP personnel and the Academy for Educational Development to develop processes for assessing program efficacy. Procedures were developed for tracking student participation and their respective activities as well as the outcomes of their efforts. Concurrently, we reengineered the federally-required Annual Performance Report into a series usable web-based data collection instruments.

Xcalibur designed and developed a longitudinal data management system to facilitate the entire data collection, analysis, and reporting effort. The utility of the system lies in its capacity to track individual GEAR UP student and program data over time by school year, thus enabling improved program evaluation. The GEAR UP system is used to track, evaluate, and report on more than 18,000 middle and high school students in 85 schools.

This all-inclusive undertaking required extensive usability analysis to ensure that the appropriate data was collected in the most efficient manner possible. For example, we simplified the intricate process of activity management, which required site facilitators to categorize each GEAR UP activity

among 60 natures of service, 26 service timing, and 23 service delivery codes.

We also designed and constructed easy-to-use, web-based student surveys which enabled teachers and students to respond to surveys in computer labs during school hours at their convenience. The result is high survey participation and an influx of useful information.

BENEFITS · Student-level participation and performance data is easily collected and compiled, providing GEAR UP administrators with 24x7 access to decision-ready information. Evaluators and researchers are able to review program reports; identify, analyze, and benchmark performance metrics; perform formative evaluations for use in internal program improvement efforts; and perform summative evaluations to substantiate a program's effectiveness.

Additionally, the burdensome process of producing the Annual Performance Report has been diminished. On-line summary reports are produced directly from the system; thereby eliminating manual data collection and report generation. Substantial time and cost savings have resulted. Now, teachers can focus on education instead of data processing and administration.

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES PRACTICE CONTACT

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