



**Michigan
Technological
University**

SIGHTLINE TO SUCCESS

At Michigan Technological University (Michigan Tech),
fiercely intelligent students “do.”

They invent, design, code, create, and collaborate. Their discoveries make humans healthier and technology smarter. Together with researchers, faculty, and industry partners, Michigan Tech Huskies create the future through high-quality research.

Tech’s mission to create a just, prosperous, and sustainable world is expressed through the students’ entrepreneurial spirit—equal parts curiosity and grit. It infuses everything they do.

The lifeblood of Husky? Battling the North wind, trudging through 200 inches of snow each winter, and staying late in the lab to discover that one, new piece of the puzzle.

It’s hard work in an intense space that fuels these students’ momentum towards innovation. Michigan Tech offers undergraduate and graduate education to 7,500 students and has an annual operating budget of \$72.5M.

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Bonnie Gorman, the Associate Vice President and Dean of Students at Michigan Tech, emphasizes that her job focuses on student success.

She's dedicated to understanding student retention issues and developing strategies to help students become successful in their own ways across various degree programs.

Her passion is serving students.

She notes that the University is committed to attracting the right students, helping them maintain all-around success through graduation, and preparing them for life after college.

PROBLEM: Bouncing retention rates—varying annually from 82% to 87%

Bonnie says that an on-going challenge at Michigan Tech has been “bouncing retention rates,” varying annually from 82% to 87% in any given year. She wants to solve this problem of fluctuation and increase retention to 90%.

Although her focus is on student success, she is also aware that fluctuating retention is an issue that can impact the financial health of the University as well.

There are obvious revenue implications associated with retention. The more students who stay to complete their degrees offset costs for the University.

Plus, many students bring scholarships with them through state and federal funding, so retention is essential to capture and maintain these financial-aid funds that equate to University revenue.

SOLUTION: Gain understanding by hiring SightLine to dig into the data

To better understand the fluctuation in retention, Michigan Tech went to SightLine for help. Historically, the University contracted professional organizations for retention analysis, but the results often raised more questions than answers.

Another option was licensing software to comprehend why students dropped out of their degree programs, but “we weren’t ready to go there. That solution is quite expensive, requires extensive training, knowledge, and time that the University doesn’t possess,” Bonnie said.

“SightLine offered the best of both worlds by using advanced analytics methods to help us understand the problem and identified specific students for outreach.”

“We provided the underlying data, and SightLine ran that data through their predictive algorithms and showed us the real predictors of student attrition,” Bonnie said.

The most significant report SightLine provided was one that listed the top 5 reasons students left school.

SightLine evaluated more variables than Michigan Tech has traditionally explored and came up with additional factors that impact students staying at the University.

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For example, the results showed that students retained at a higher rate if they are employed on campus as opposed to not being employed on campus.

“One strategy that we’re beginning to look at is meeting with the financial aid office and saying, ‘Can we adjust our financial aid in such a way that we could give students aid for working on campus?’”

“It’s a huge conversation but would that move the needle for those students? An interesting idea and strategy,” said Bonnie.

SightLine’s executive summary notes that students at Michigan Tech who don’t get engaged in any kind of student activity or student organization on campus are at a higher-level risk of leaving.

Bonnie indicated, “This has caused us to reflect on how we market our student organizations. **We have over 220 organizations on campus. What do we need to change in order to get students plugged in and connected in something that they might enjoy and therefore want to stay?**”

This fall, Bonnie also shared the executive summary with academic advisors, resident assistants, and orientation team leaders, all influencers who work with incoming students.

These results can then further inform conversations as well as provide a cornerstone for future programming.

DELIVERABLE: Report detailing specific students at risk of dropping out

Another critically important report SightLine provided included specific students who were at risk for dropping out.

“We were able to use this information to build a communications plan based on a student’s probability of leaving. We refined our messaging, offering intervention strategies to try to help them stay in school,” said Bonnie.

BOTTOM LINE: \$1.2M identified in potential additional tuition revenue

SightLine was also able to identify \$1.2M in potential additional tuition revenue through their work with Michigan Tech. This encompasses the newly identified at-risk students that were not being identified by more traditional methods such as looking at academic performance and demographics alone.

The University has the opportunity to capture this additional tuition revenue by intervening with at-risk students earlier and with more targeted strategies.

This opportunity is tremendous.

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"In Michigan we are seeing state appropriations are continuing to decline and tuition is getting more expensive. So, we are particularly sensitive to how to best deploy resources and help students be more successful."

Asked about what advice she would give to other institutions interested in improving student retention, Bonnie notes:

"Think about the data and be prepared for some iteration. You may think that you know what data is required for understanding student retention, but a fresh perspective may help you understand that you have not been looking at the problem correctly. **Trust the people who have the right combination of data analytical, higher education and reporting and analysis expertise.** There is a way to dramatically improve student retention results and lower your costs. That's what universities need to do to help their students succeed and to help solve their financial challenges."

TAKEAWAY: SightLine can help you improve student retention and budget management

SightLine travels deeper into the data and is an affordable option especially when compared to other options.

They have helped Michigan Tech reassess how they approach student success and retention by directing focus to the main areas where University-led intervention can make an impact.

With SightLine's analysis and data driven recommendations, Michigan Tech and other universities can strategically support more students to continue with their degrees to completion.



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