

Addressing Drop-Out Rates in Higher Education

François Bouchet, Vanda Luengo

Sorbonne Université, France
{francois.bouchet, vanda.luengo}@lip6.fr

Geoffray Bonnin, Anne Boyer, Armelle Brun

Université de Lorraine, France
{geoffray.bonnin, anne.boyer, armelle.brun}@loria.fr

Mohamed Amine Chatti

University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany
mohamed.chatti@uni-due.de

Irene-Angelica Chounta

University of Tartu, Estonia
chounta@ut.ee

María Jesús Rodríguez-Triana, Kairit Tammet

Tallin University, Estonia
{mjrt, kairit}@tlu.ee

Agathe Merceron, Petra Sauer

Beuth University of Applied Sciences
{merceron, sauer}@beuth-hochschule.de

ABSTRACT: This proposal describes the goal and activities of the LAK 2020 half-day symposium on Addressing Drop-Out Rates in Higher Education (ADORE 2020). The purpose of the symposium is to bring together a community of stakeholders (namely, researchers and practitioners) who work on data-driven, learning analytics for detecting students at-risk and on strategic designs for addressing dropouts in Higher Education. Our goal is to promote knowledge sharing by building a knowledge base of successful practices and to communicate lessons learnt from the design and adoption of institutional analytics in diverse contexts in order to contribute to robust, sustainable and transferable analytical solutions.

Keywords: dropouts, higher education, institutional analytics, data-driven decision making.

1 SYMPOSIUM BACKGROUND

The working environment is constantly evolving. The labor market desperately needs graduates from different disciplines and also requires workers to keep themselves up to date, engaging in lifelong learning solutions (UNESCO, 2016). In such a scenario, Higher Education (HE) institutions play a crucial role. As several international reports show (European Commission, 2015; European Commission, 2017; EDUCAUSE, 2019), the educational community and its policy makers are concerned with the HE success rates, and try to find strategies to attract students to education, keep them on board, and guide them to successfully acquire their degrees.

Student dropout is a complex topic, which is affected by different personal, instructional, social and organisational factors. We focus mainly on instructional factors such as gaps in course and program designs, students' under-performance, absence of feedback loops and we seek possibilities to address these. The organizers of this symposium are exploring data-driven strategies to promote student retention, to provide post-entry support, guidance and counselling of students, and to scaffold students' meta-cognitive strategies. However, despite the potential of the ongoing research in supporting student's academic success, our analytical solutions are still in an early stage or piloting phase and, only a small number of stakeholders (mainly researchers) have access to them.

This symposium will focus on learning analytics approaches for reducing student dropout in HE. Our aim is to contribute to *"shaping the future of the field"* (LAK 2020 conference theme¹) by bringing together established research practices from various contexts (that is, different countries, different academic institutions and different domains), building a knowledge base of successful paradigms (for example, analytical approaches and decision-making strategies) and sharing the lessons learnt during the process of addressing student dropouts in Higher Education. The goal of this symposium is twofold:

- a) To create a community of stakeholders in order to share expertise, receive feedback and communicate lessons learnt from the design, adoption and application of data-driven practices (institutional analytics) for addressing dropouts in Higher Education, and;
- b) To contribute in building a knowledge base of successful practices that are essential for the adoption of learning and institutional analytics.

This symposium will emphasize the design and adaptation of robust, sustainable and transferable strategies for the future. To that end, we aim to report and guide each other in the following directions:

- Defining a solid basis for ethics, data privacy and compliance for the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR);
- Integrating the stakeholders in the loop and putting the students in the center;
- Promoting a holistic approach where reducing dropout is not only an institutional matter but a shared goal among stakeholders;
- Closing the loop to assess and provide evidence about the added value that strategies have in terms of user acceptance and impact on reducing dropout rates.

For any of the above themes, we welcome the contributions of researchers and practitioners. Contributions can take the form of papers for presentation (maximum 6 pages), posters or demos (maximum 3 pages).

2 ORGANISATIONAL DETAILS

2.1 Type of Event

Mini-tracks/Symposia. We aim at a program committee of about 20 members so that the review load should be one / two contributions maximum per reviewer.

¹ <https://lak20.solaresearch.org/>

2.2 Proposed Schedule and Duration

This symposium is planned as a half-day event. We propose the following schedule:

- 8:30am-8:40am: Welcome, introduction, and goal of the workshop.
- 8:45am-9:00am: Attendees present themselves shortly.
- 9:00am-10:30am: 4 x presentation + discussion (10 minutes presentation, 10 minutes discussion each).
- 10:30am-10:45am: Break (15 minutes).
- 10:45am-11:15am: Poster/Demo session (max. 6) with discussion or with handouts.
- 11:15am-12:00am: Discussion: shaping best practices and building a knowledge base
- 12:00am-12:30 am: Wrap up & dissemination of results & future joint actions & Goodbye.

2.3 Type of Participation

The event supports mixed participation. Both participants with a paper submission and interested delegates may register to attend.

2.4 Symposium Activities

The symposium will host paper presentations along with poster and demo sessions. Additionally, we aim to engage participants in semi-structured, round table discussions regarding ways to address dropouts in HE and specifically on the following directions: 1) student-centered, participatory design, 2) generalizability and transferability, 3) ethics and data privacy and 4) impact and added-value.

2.5 Expected participant numbers and planned dissemination activities to recruit attendants

The symposium aims at 20 participants. To recruit participants, we will communicate this event using social media platforms (Twitter, ResearchGate etc.) and mailing lists of international (SOLAR, EDM, EATEL, ISLS) and national (e.g., nordicLASI, SNOLA in Spain, ATIEF in France, GI in Germany) communities and initiatives. Additionally, we will launch a workshop website that will be linked to the LAK2020 website and we will form a program committee of about 20 members to disseminate the workshop further with the networks of the members.

It should be noticed that the organisers come from six different academic institutions from three countries, and at least the attendance of representatives from these institutions is guaranteed.

2.6 Required equipment

Projector, flipcharts, post-it notes, apple adapter and a room suitable for group discussion. The seating should first be arranged as rows.

3 ORGANISATIONAL DETAILS

The workshop goals are:

- Report and share among the participant experience with institutional LA solutions. How LA is supporting learning and success?

- Familiarize participants with different existing institutional LA solutions to address drop-out;
- Identify challenges and good practices;
- Bring together researchers, practitioners, educational developers and policymakers.

This will allow:

- For novice participants, to learn about the field and get involved;
- For more expert participants, to share their experiences and receive feedback;
- To facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration among the participants from different backgrounds like governance, researchers, teachers, and so on.

In this way, we aim to advance the field and discuss challenges and issues related to the institutional LA and student dropout. All accepted contributions will be published in the “LAK Companion Proceedings”. The outcomes of the workshop will be published on the workshop’s website. A further intended outcome is the joint publication of a handbook (with extended contributions from the participants) that will report and reflect on the symposium’s contributions and discussions as well as on envisioning the future of institutional analytics.

4 STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE SYMPOSIUM WEBSITE

- Call for papers (theme, submission guidelines)
- Important Dates
- Workshop description
- Organizers, program committee
- Accepted papers
- Outcomes from the workshop after the workshop

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