

Questionmark Case Study

Dallas Theological Seminary: Using survey and assessment data analysis to enhance student learning

"No more sharpened #2 pencils around here!"

Background

Dallas Theological Seminary is a private, evangelical theological seminary with extension campuses in Atlanta, Austin, Houston, San Antonio, and Tampa. It includes a large online education program which is expanding into multiple languages. The seminary is known for having trained a number of high profile theologians over the decades since its start with 13 students in 1927. Today the school has more than 2,050 students from more than 54 different countries.

Challenges

The graduate school began using Questionmark Perception™ in 2007 to perform institutional research that required conducting surveys and assessments. Before switching to Perception, DTS used independent databases and spreadsheets for the different surveys. This often posed challenges for data security and made reporting difficult and time consuming. Some of the assessments were on Scantron sheets, which proved to be a labor-intensive process for faculty and students who sometimes did not have a way to get to campus for the assessment.

DTS Assistant Director for Institutional Research Mark Howell says the seminary looked at several different possible solutions to move their surveys and assessments online. One of their primary goals was to choose a software solution that would provide more sophisticated analytical tools.

Moving Online

DTS began to gradually implement Questionmark Perception and move their assessments onto the system. Although they started self-hosting, DTS switched to an outside host for data security and reliability.

Today, almost all assessments, quizzes and surveys are performed online. "We were also able to expand our distance learning efforts," says Howell.

"Questionmark Secure gives us a safe way to perform assessments and tests online." DTS also uses Perception to test students outside the country: several assessments have been translated into Mandarin.

Valuable Data

One of the most valuable features of Perception, according to Howell, is the SQL database that preserves all of the data, making it possible to perform historical analysis on student learning. Perception has enabled DTS to gather and analyze data through surveys and assessments in order to enhance student learning and show quality control to maintain regional accreditation requirements.

Depending on the nature of assessments – final exams in language courses, Bible or theology courses—DTS also uses tools like immediate feedback to offer students quick results.

Most often, on objective assessments, like unit quizzes and final exams, the students see a summary sheet at the end of the assessment. This report shows them the score they received and lists the questions they missed with the correct answers. "Another high-stakes assessment we have them take is scored and analyzed, and the students receive a letter telling them how they did in terms of the percentile of the cohort they belong to and the historical percentile for different areas of the assessment," says Howell. To him, the benefits of using online assessments are apparent:

"Questionmark Perception has aided faculty and staff in cutting much of the time spent manually grading assessments. We couldn't be happier with the ease of access to assessments. No more sharpened #2 pencils around here!"

More information

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