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VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE

Are Institutions Ready for Analytics? Privacy, Confidentiality, Policies

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Agenda

- Why?
- 5 Key Research Findings
- Question & Answer

Learning Analytics & Student Feedback

- Learning analytics:
  - the measurement, collection, analysis, and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, with the goal of understanding and optimizing learning and the environments in which learning occurs (SoLAR; Ifenthaler, Schumacher, 2016; Slade, Prinsloo, 2013)
- Feedback in Learning Analytics
  - Samoilova, et al (2017) exploring how to combine feedback with digital behavior data for more robust learning analytics
  - In their paper, Pardo, et al (2019) exploring the use of learning analytics and feedback at scale
- Research suggests student privacy concerns can drive alienation from institutions, analytics (Mollick & Pearson, 2006; Roberts et al, 2017)

Research Question

- "Are institutions' privacy frameworks and policies keeping up with quickly growing and diverse sets of digital student data for analytics?"
  - Do institutional privacy frameworks balance protecting privacy and confidentiality, while ensuring that learning analytics can help discover meaningful patterns in student data, to better inform decisions and guide data-driven improvement in teaching and learning?

Research Team, Funded by MITACS

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- Rebecca Katz, Doctoral Candidate, School of Information Studies, McGill University
- Dr. Yeona Jang, Chief Community Engagement Officer, Explorance

Methods

- Reviewed publicly available documents providing information on use of student feedback (student evaluations of teaching) in learning analytics from various Canadian colleges and Universities
  - Institutions' websites were searched
- In particular, reviewed publicly available institutional policies on student evaluations of teaching data specifically and privacy policies in general
- Conducted informational interviews with six stakeholders from a sample of Canadian academic institutions, to validate search and interpretation

Let's Poll!

As for your institution's privacy/confidentiality policy on student data and learning analytics, in the past six months

- Question 1: How easy is it for academic staff to find them?
- Question 2: How easy is it for faculty to find them?
- Question 3: How easy is it for students to find them?

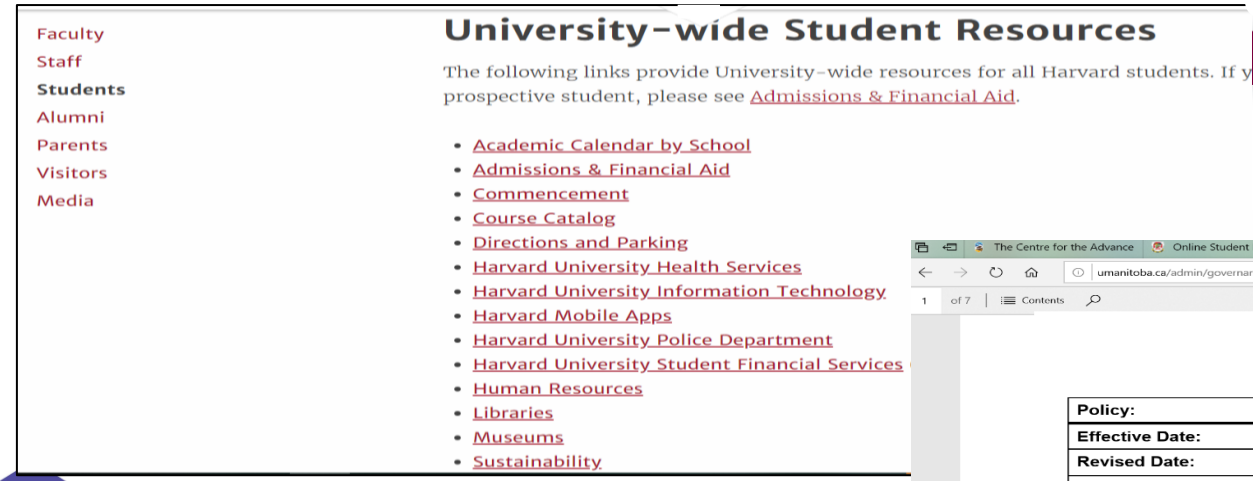
Sample Diversity

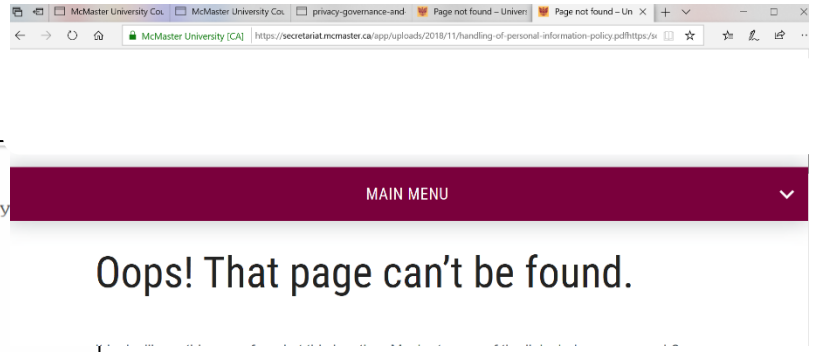
- Polytechnics
  - 7 Ontario institutions; 6 Western Canada institutions
- Medical/doctoral universities
  - 1 Atlantic Canada; 5 Ontario; 1 Quebec; 5 Western Canada
- Comprehensive universities:
  - 3 Atlantic Canada institutions; 3 Ontario; 1 Quebec; 3 Western Canada
- Primarily undergraduate universities:
  - 2 Atlantic Canada institutions; 3 Ontario; 1 Quebec; 2 Western Canada

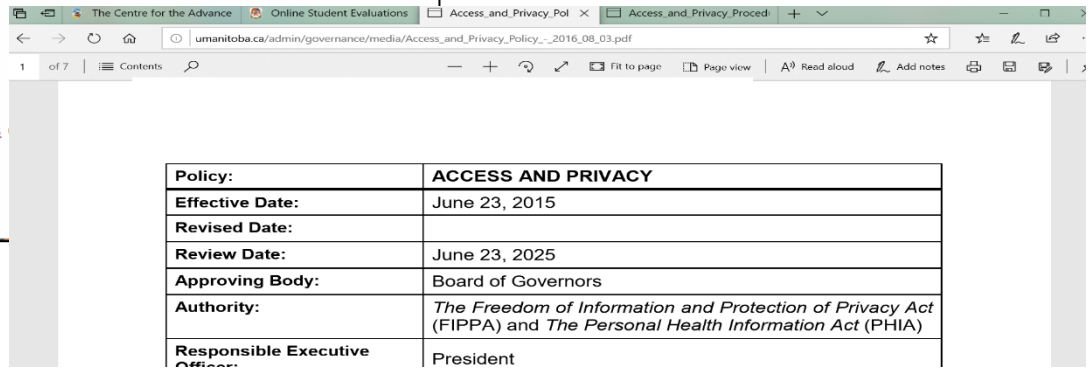
What Have We Learned?

Information scattered across many documents

- Governance info may be found in student evaluation policies (comprehensive ones rare!), FAQ's, high-level privacy policies, reminders, collective agreements…
- Difficult to navigate







Inconsistencies between institutions in:

- Inconsistencies among institutions in
  - where to find information (what documents address governance?);
  - extent of info;
  - Institutional governance of feedback data
- Only consistency was inconsistency – and silence on governance

Relative silence on privacy of feedback data

- Aspects of governance, privacy, security neglected – e.g., length of retention
- No cross-referencing between feedback data policies and privacy/access to info policies
- Little information about privacy communicated to students and faculty, beyond generic pledge of anonymity/confidentiality
- Little governance on use of student feedback data in analytics to improve teaching & learning, while protecting confidentiality and privacy

Uses of data not always specified

- Inconsistent – some institutions specified more uses (teaching improvement, tenure/employment) than others
- What about research and publications? Rarely specified (only three explicit references)

No connection/references to learning analytics

- Can student feedback data be combined with other data points in analytics? No mention in documents sampled
- Yet, research suggests student privacy concerns can drive alienation from institutions, analytics (Mollick & Pearson, 2006; Roberts et al, 2017)

Huh….it seems we are in the "Wild, Wild West" of privacy/confidentiality and learning analytics

Faculty and students don't know policies exist	Policies are not applied consistently in all applicable contexts, governance compromised
Faculty and students can't find them	Communication on privacy, confidentiality, and learning analytics is not effective, can "import" best practices such as mandatory tutorials on harassment, plagiarism
Students don't feel they are being heard (they have a voice)	Students are not engaged, actionable information is ignored, policies are not updated

Wild Wild West Stage of Student Feedback Data and Learning Analytic: What Can We Do?

- Findings indicates the need to define a comprehensive, easy to find policies, in order to realize the benefits in learning analytics in a tangible manner
  - Understand the challenges academic institutions face
    - in combining feedback data and other student data for analytics
    - in governing these data points;
  - Analyze policies at their own institutions for areas to strengthen to harness the power of student feedback data in learning analytics, while protecting privacy and confidentiality
  - Adapt institutional policies within their own institutions

Closing Poll:

What can you do? (choose all that apply)

1. Identify my institution's policies and their “owners”
2. Contact my communications team to improve awareness of these policies
3. Develop policies on student feedback in learning analytics
4. None of Above, but other thing(s) I can do
5. None of above, and not sure yet

Questions?

- Questions?
- Contacts
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