

# Enhancing the Ethical Use of Learning Analytics in Australian Higher Education

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Ensuring the ethical use of data about students is an important consideration in the use of learning analytics in Australian higher education. In early 2019 a discussion paper was published by a group of learning analytics specialists in the sector to help promote the conversation around the key ethical issues institutions need to address in order to ensure the ethical use of learning analytics. This panel session will explore these ethical issues in more detail and update the conversation with new perspectives and provocations. The panel will include authors of the discussion paper and structured so the audience will have an active role in considering the key issues and advancing the ongoing conversations about these important issues.

Keywords: Learning Analytics, Ethics, Higher Education

## Background

In Australian higher education the use of learning analytics to support student learning has been steadily increasing over the last decade. This has been enabled by a growth in the integration of technology across the delivery of educational offerings, resulting in large amounts of data being collected about students' activities as they progress through programs of study. While the ability to explore and analyse this data provides new opportunities to support students and improve the learning environment, there are several important ethical considerations that must be acknowledged to ensure this is done in an ethical way (Slade & Prinsloo, 2013). These considerations are quite complex in nature, requiring institutions to address and balance the benefit of using the data with students' rights and privacy. Not surprisingly, many Australian higher education institutions are still formulating or refining their response in an effort to ensure ethical practice. Research on the implementation of learning analytics across the sector has noted this struggle and encouraged institutions to take action (Colvin et al., 2016; West et al., 2016).

In order to support Australian institutions in this process, a group of learning analytics specialists from across multiple universities came together in 2018/2019 to draft a discussion paper outlining the main ethical issues relating to the use of learning analytics and identified key considerations for educational leaders and practitioners (Corrin et al., 2019). The main ethical principles explored in the paper included: privacy; data ownership and control; transparency; consent; anonymity; non-maleficence and beneficence; data management and security; and access. The discussion paper explored these principles within the context of how learning analytics can be used in universities and with reference to a range of existing frameworks that have been developed and used internationally (e.g. JISC Code of Practice for Learning Analytics). A series of case studies were used to examine these concepts in context and to demonstrate the need for institutions to carefully consider the wide range of issues vital to ensuring ethical practice. The paper concludes with seven key considerations around things institutions could do to in order to address the ethical issues learning analytics raises.

## The Panel

The intention of the discussion paper was to offer support to institutions in developing policies and procedures for their approach to using of learning analytics in an ethical way and also to promote a broader national discussion of these key issues. The proposed panel will continue this conversation by revisiting the key considerations of the paper with updated perspectives developed since the discussion paper was published at the start of the year. The chair of the panel will provide a brief overview of the discussion paper which will be followed by a short presentation from each of the panelists on an area of change. Each panelist will be given the opportunity to raise questions for the audience to consider relating to how student data is collected and used by higher education institution and the audience will also be given the chance to ask questions of the panelists. The panel will be made

up of authors of the discussion paper and associated who are all active researchers in the field of learning analytics. These include:

**Associate Professor Linda Corrin (Chair)** is the Academic Director, Transforming Learning at Swinburne University of Technology. Currently, she is working on several large research projects exploring how learning analytics can be used to provide meaningful and timely feedback to academics and students. Linda is co-founder of the Victorian/Tasmanian Learning Analytics Network and a co-ordinator of the ASCILITE Learning Analytics SIG.

**Dr Cassandra Colvin** is the Research Manager, Student Strategy Evaluation at the University of Queensland. Prior to this appointment, she was Manager, Adaptive Learning and Teaching Services at Charles Sturt University, and Manager, Learning Analytics, and Manager, Enhancing Student Academic Potential – an academic intervention program targeting first-year students who have been identified as 'at-risk' – both appointments at the University of South Australia. Cassandra has researched and presented widely on themes relating to learning analytics, international student support, and intercultural interactions and communication.

**Dr Kirsty Kitto** is a senior lecturer in data science at the Connected Intelligence Centre, University of Technology Sydney. At UTS she works to deliver learning analytics infrastructure that will help the university to provide students with better feedback and personalised learning experiences. This forces her to consider concepts like scalability of tools, data interoperability and portability, and the ethics of varying infrastructure designs and implementations.

**Dr Danny Toohey** is a Senior Lecturer in Information Technology at Murdoch University. He teaches in the areas of database design and business analytics, where he makes use of the data collected about his students' interactions with the LMS to inform his teaching and curriculum design. His research has been focussed in the areas of Learning Analytics and Transnational Education. He has been involved with the ongoing Innovative Research Universities (IRU) Learning Analytics projects since 2013.

## Intended Audience

The panel session is designed for a broad audience in roles that relate to the use of student data to improve learning and teaching practices. These roles could include, but are not limited to, teachers, learning designers, managers, learning analytics specialists, data scientists, educational support staff and learning analytics vendors. The pervasiveness of the use of learning analytics in higher education means that the issues explored by the panel will be relevant to many and in broadening the conversation started by the publication of the discussion paper the authors would like to promote these conversations to as many people in the sector as possible.

This panel aligns with two of the key themes of this year's ASCILITE conference. It relates to the theme of "Data Analytics & Evidence to Improve Teaching & Learning" by directly exploring a key concept for the field of learning analytics. In exploring and responding to the challenges of ensuring ethical practice it also aligns with the theme of "Practices and Challenges in Technology Enhanced Learning".

## References

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