



Online Student Engagement: An Overview

When you teach on-campus, it is easy to address the question, ‘are your students engaged?’ because you can see the students who are present and (for the most part) you can see what they are doing. However, during periods of exclusive online learning, the ability to measure student engagement with course content and learning activities becomes increasingly important. But how to do it?

Measuring online student engagement at UniSA is a straightforward activity because all the hard work of pulling the data together has been done for you. Student engagement drives the various analytic reports that are provided on your course **dashboard**. These reports help you to identify those students who may be having trouble staying connected with their studies, peers and teaching staff when studying online, so that interventions can be made to re-connect them. It can also help you to determine which resources students are engaging with – and which they are not – helping to enhance your course website design.

Although student engagement with online learning platforms has been proven to correlate with better academic performance (Rodgers, 2008) a student may still perform well in a course without actively using the course website. Therefore, the data reports of student engagement are best used to provide additional insights into student engagement *behaviour* or used as a meaningful starting point for an informed dialogue with students on learning behaviours they need to adjust to improve their success in their studies.

This *Guide* provides an overview of the analytic reports that are automatically available in learn**online** and focuses on how to access the reports via the Dashboard. It also discusses some issues related to interpreting student engagement data. It is the first of a series of *Guides* on using learning analytics. Subsequent *Guides* will look at analytic reports from learn**online**, other systems (e.g. Panopto, and eReserve) and individual student engagement across multiple courses.

What is student engagement and how is it measured?

Digital engagement encompasses all the touchpoints you have setup for your students in **learnonline**. Essentially, it can be anything and everything that involves an online interaction, ranging from opening and clicking links to forums, quizzes and video recordings. Probably the most widely used definition for engagement is one offered by Kuh *et al.* who state that “Student engagement represents both the time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities and the effort institutions devote to using effective educational practices.” (2008, p. 542).

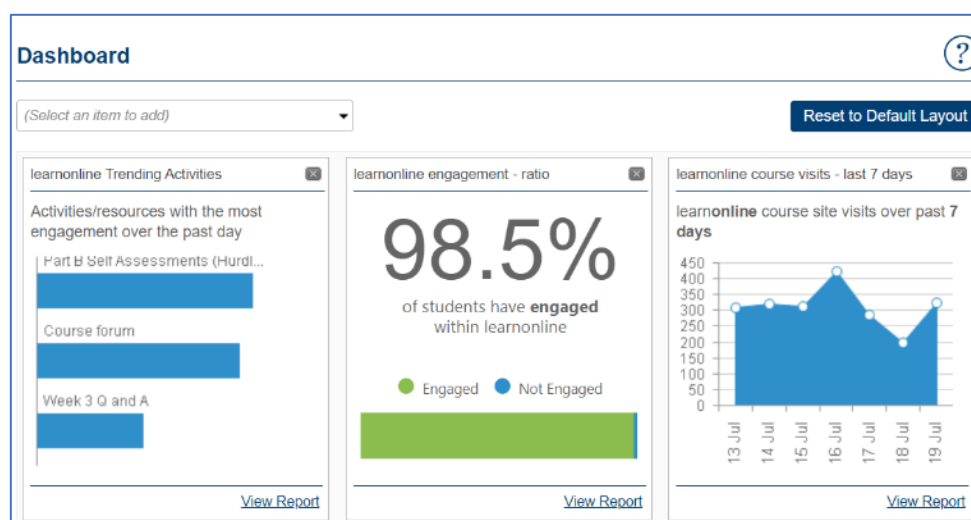
So how can you tell whether your students are engaged online– and what can you do if they’re not?

At UniSA there are three basic types of analytic reports:

- those focused on **all students use of learnonline activities**,
- those focused on **all students use of activities in other systems** (such as video recordings, reading lists and Panopto recordings)
- and reports on any **individual student’s activity across multiple course websites in a program**.

Teaching Dashboard

All the above reports can be accessed via the **Teaching Dashboard** for your course.

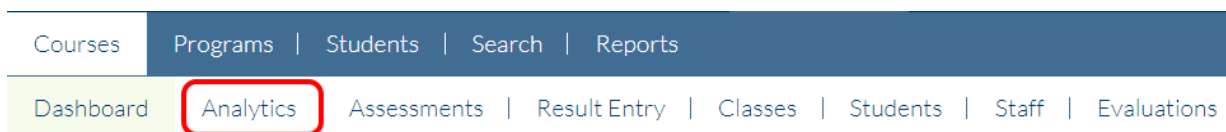


Once you know which reports are most helpful for your course, you can customise the Dashboard for a quick visual representation of student interaction with your learnonline site.

- Help resource – [Access Dashboard](#)
- Help resource – [Dashboard Customisation](#)

Analytics Reports

The *Analytics* tab on your course Dashboard provides access to detailed learnonline reports as well as engagement reports for other systems (e.g. video recordings, reading lists and Panopto recordings). It also offers you the capacity to drill down to engagement data sets for individual students.



- Help resource – [Analytics tab](#)

The available automated course analytic reports relating to learnonline activities include:

- Course Need to Know/ Do Completion (*UniSA Online courses only*)
- Course Site Visits (Month/Study period)
- Forum engagement
- Forum engagement (Tabular)
- learnonline Activities and Resources
- Student course site visits
- Student course site visits (first time log in and weekly/daily visits)
- Student Course site visits (Tabular)
- Student enrolments / Withdrawals
- Student learnonline engagement
- Student learnonline engagement (Ratio)
- Student Need to Know/Do completion (*UniSA Online courses only*)
- Student Summary



The learn**online** Assessment Reports include:

- Assessment Grade Distribution
- Course Grade Distribution
- Final Grade Distribution
- Student Late Submissions
- Date vs Grades
- Turnitin Similarity

The analytic reports relating to other system activities include:

- Recording reports
- Reading list reports
- Panopto video analytics

The automated analytic report relating to an individual student's activities covers:

- Individual assessments for all current and previous courses the student is/was enrolled in
- an engagement report in a graphic format that collates the current grades and key learning analytics reports for that individual student.

Caveats on Using Student Engagement Data

Because digital student engagement covers so much ground, it can be overwhelming to analyse and track all dimensions of student online activity. There are a few caveats to be made around the use of engagement data reports.

Firstly, engagement data is useful as a guide for, and not as a measure of, academic success. There is no mechanism for ensuring that a whole cohort will engage with your learn**online** site.

Secondly, student generated data provides a potentially rich set of data, however, you need to be aware that the data is incomplete, that it is a snapshot, not an exhaustive set of data. Most of the data provides

anonymised aggregate trends, collected over a 24 period and then presented as 24 hour, weekly or monthly blocks of data. Also, the reports don't take into consideration how students are engaging with their learning outside of UniSA systems (printed material, publisher resources, YouTube etc.).

Thirdly, the collected data is not specifically contextualised for your course, nor does it take into consideration the characteristics of your cohort, the specifics of your teaching approach or the disciplinary cognitive development you intended.

Fourthly, it is important then that you cast a critical eye over the data reports for your course. You need to critically evaluate the course analytics by asking probing questions such as:

- What is meaningful data for my course?
- What assumptions are being made with each report?
- Is there enough data to deduce meaning, and if so to what degree of accuracy?
- How do I ensure the reports are meaningful?

This means that to get the most from the data collected about your course it would be beneficial to plan for and identify the purpose for accessing the reports on the Dashboard.

Finally, the reports contain sensitive information as referenced by *Policy A-46.12 Confidentiality of students' personal information*. Before you can download a report, you need to acknowledge this confidentiality by ticking a box as displayed in the image below

This report contains sensitive student data, to download please select the acknowledgement

I have read and will comply with the student confidentiality information referenced [here](#)

This *Guide* has provided an overview of the different types of student engagement reports that are available. The next *Guide* in this series will



look at student engagement reports specifically from learnonline and what you can do in response to poor engagement.

If you would like to ask online teaching and learning questions related to your course, you can look through our [FAQs](#), write to TIU@unisa.edu.au, have an [online consultation with a member of the TIU](#) or complete the online modules as part of [Introduction to Engaging Learners Online](#).

References

Kuh, G, Cruce, T, Shoup, R, Kinzie, J & Gonyea, R 2008, Unmasking the effects of student engagement on first year college grades and persistence, *Journal of Higher Education*, vol.79, no. 5, pp. 540–563. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/OO221546.2008.11772116>>

Rodgers, T 2008, Student engagement in the e-learning process and the impact on their grades. *International Journal of Cyber Society and Education*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 143-156, <<http://academic-pub.org/ojs/index.php/IJCSE/article/view/519>>.

University of South Australia 2020, *Policy No: A-46.12 Confidentiality of students' personal information*, University of South Australia, viewed 15 July 2020, <<https://i.unisa.edu.au/siteassets/policies-and-procedures/docs/academic/a-46-confidentiality-of-students.pdf>>.