



Dr. Alan Olinsky, Professor of Applied Math

Bryant University Gives Data Mining Students a Leg Up in a Tough Job Market

Industry

Education

Business Issue

A Bryant University professor wanted to teach students data mining with a tool that many of the FORTUNE Global 500® use.

Solution

SAS OnDemand for Academics connects students to a SAS-hosted server over the Web. Students can use SAS® Enterprise Miner™ for data mining wherever they have Internet access. There is no need for campus IT support, no cost to professors and minimal cost to students.

Benefits

The user-friendly, point-and-click interface of SAS Enterprise Miner offered through SAS OnDemand for Academics makes it easy for students to learn data mining that is highly valued in an otherwise tight job market.

Bryant University's Dr. Alan Olinsky knows exactly how to entice students to take applied statistics – show them the online job postings for companies seeking data mining professionals. “While giving a presentation to incoming students, I went to an online job site and searched for SAS® jobs. There were 1,400 hits and this was when the job market was pretty tight.”

With SAS OnDemand for Academics, it's now even easier for his students to get the education they need to find jobs. Instead of loading SAS software onto a computer lab's server for their data mining course using SAS® Enterprise Miner™, students get to easily access the software online. As an added plus, all Bryant University students get a laptop with their paid tuition. So being able to access the software online lets them work anywhere, anytime.

“Our students can't always access a lab when they are not in class,” says Olinsky. “With SAS OnDemand for Academics, they can just come in during my office hours with their laptops and show me what they're working on.” When students were dependent on using a lab, it was hard to complete classwork if they went home for the weekend or were otherwise off-campus. That's no longer a problem with the on-demand feature. “They're able to devote more time to working on things than if they were in a lab environment. Not being tied to a lab setting is a real plus,” Olinsky says.

Turning Students On to Statistics

Olinsky began working with SAS software six years ago – attending summer seminars designed for college professors at the company's campus. He was interested in SAS because, unlike some of the other software traditionally taught to statistics and applied math majors, SAS is used in a majority of the FORTUNE Global 500® corporations. The same is increasingly true for actuarial math, a part of Olinsky's department. “We used to teach languages like PL 1 and Excel, but now insurance companies are indicating the need for SAS.”



Bryant is located in Smithfield, RI, between Providence and Boston, and it has earned a spot on *BusinessWeek's* top undergraduate business programs list. Because the professors see such value in learning SAS, Bryant students are encouraged to take SAS – not only math and statistics students, but finance, business and marketing students as well. “All the business majors are required to have a minor,” explains Olinsky. “The finance faculty, especially, see the need for SAS, but we're trying to encourage more marketing students to look at data mining because it is so relevant to marketing analytics.”

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Dr. Alan Olinsky
Professor of Applied Math
Bryant University

Bryant also offers a certificate in SAS data mining through the Applied Mathematics and Statistics Department. Students take four courses to earn the certificate. Nearly two dozen universities around the world have consulted with SAS to offer a certificate program, designed to recognize students with advanced SAS knowledge.

Olinsky considers SAS Enterprise Miner a particularly effective tool to teach students data mining “because it is so visual. You can apply sophisticated tools without being too concerned about the math (or programming) behind some of the actual procedures.”

It is also easy to learn. “My whole class was able to really get a good handle on the concept of data mining and the use of predictive modeling tools,” Olinsky said. The cost of a one-semester SAS OnDemand for Academics account and the training guide was less than the cost of a statistics textbook.

Making Distance Learning Easier

With SAS OnDemand for Academics, students don’t have to be on campus to learn. Olinsky worked with a grad student who was off campus all summer on a class that involved SAS Enterprise Miner. “It allows more flexibility,” he explains. The university also offers a distance-learning MBA program designed to be taken by a group of employees at a company. While the health services corporation that Olinsky worked with last fall chose to install SAS Enterprise Miner on their network, he sees the on-demand option as opening up data mining course curriculum to a much broader span of students.

Whether using SAS OnDemand for Academics or from the school network, working with students in the workplace also leads to projects that help teacher and student understand the value of data mining and the need to learn how to cope with messy or missing data (rarely a problem in the classroom set-

ting). One of Olinsky’s distance student teams won a national award for the work they did studying how different types of physicians ordered and interpreted medical tests differently in an emergency room setting. It led to policy changes that improved healthcare at the company’s hospitals.

Statistics: The Hot Job of the Next Decade

Olinsky says that learning about SAS is extremely useful for university students. “When interviewers hear SAS and data mining, it’s a very big plus on the resume,” he explains. “In a video on YouTube, the head economist at Google talks about how statistics is the dream job for the 2010s. There is so much data out there and we don’t have enough people to analyze it. Statistics is becoming a very popular area and SAS is an integral part of that.”



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