JWU Achieves Record-Breaking Retention and Enrollment Gains with EdSights

JOHNSON & WALES
UNIVERSITY

Type of Institution
4 Year, Private

Population
8,274 Students

Location
Providence, RI
Charlotte, NC
Online

At Johnson & Wales University, ensuring student success has always been a priority. But before implementing EdSights, the university relied on manual, time-consuming methods to identify struggling students—faculty alerts, surveys, and early warning systems that weren't so early after all.

However, as student needs evolved, JWU recognized an opportunity to enhance its approach with real-time engagement and personalized support at scale. By implementing EdSights' AI-powered chatbot, named Wildcat Willie after JWU's mascot, JWU opened a direct line of communication with more students, strengthened its intervention strategies, and achieved record-breaking retention and enrollment gains.

The Challenge: Delayed Insights, Disjointed Outreach

With thousands of students across multiple campuses, JWU needed a way to identify at-risk students in real time and provide support before it was too late.

LAGGING DATA
Surveys took weeks or months to analyze

SILOED EFFORTS
Decentralized support systems made it difficult to track concerns effectively
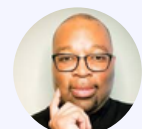
GAPS IN SUPPORT
Inconsistent outreach risked students slipping through the cracks

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Before Wildcat Willie, our outreach was effective but not always immediate. **Now, students can raise their hands in real-time, and we're able to connect them to resources instantly.** That has changed the way we support our students.

Dameian Slocum
Assistant Provost for Student Achievement

The EdSights Solution

To enhance its retention and student success strategy, JWU introduced Wildcat Willie, an AI-powered chatbot, to bridge the gap between students and support services. Students now have an easy, immediate way to share concerns, allowing JWU to intervene faster and more effectively, rather than waiting for faculty alerts or survey results.

With Wildcat Willie, JWU shifted from reactive to proactive student engagement by:

ENGAGING WITH STUDENTS DIRECTLY AND OFTEN
Wildcat Willie regularly checks in with students, prompting them to share concerns before they become barriers to persistence

CREATING IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION OPPORTUNITIES
Students who indicate they need support are flagged instantly, allowing JWU staff to reach out within days, not weeks

SCALING OUTREACH WITHOUT ADDITIONAL STAFF LIFT
Wildcat Willie helps connect large numbers of students to resources at scale, ensuring students receive the support they need when they need it

The Results: Record Retention Increases

Mattie, curious how you're feeling.

Are you returning to JWU this Fall term?

[1] Yes 🤗
[2] Unsure ❓
[3] No 🥺
[4] I'm graduating 🎉

By surfacing hidden struggles and connecting students with resources faster than ever, Wildcat Willie has transformed JWU's ability to support and retain students.

6.2% ↑
University Wide

8.2% ↑
Charlotte Campus

5.8% ↑
Providence Campus

Beyond Retention: Data That Drives Action

JWU's record-breaking retention gains didn't happen by chance—they happened because the university took action on real-time student data. Wildcat Willie didn't just identify at-risk students; it uncovered critical insights that reshaped how JWU supports its students.

ADDRESSING PERSISTENCE BARRIERS AT EVERY STAGE

The data revealed that persistence barriers weren't limited to first-year students. Upperclassmen were also facing challenges—like confidence gaps—that impacted their ability to stay enrolled. In response, JWU expanded academic support beyond traditional first-year programming to address the needs of students at every stage.

HOMESICKNESS DOESN'T END AFTER YEAR ONE

Conventional wisdom said homesickness was a first-year issue—but the data told a different story. Sophomores, juniors, and even seniors were feeling disconnected, prompting JWU to extend community-building initiatives beyond the first semester.

THE POWER OF THE STUDENT VOICE

Through the Student Voice Score generated from outreach by Wildcat Willie, JWU now receives unfiltered feedback from students about their satisfaction with their experience, allowing leadership to make informed, data-backed decisions that directly impact student experience and persistence.

Looking Ahead

With record-breaking retention and enrollment gains and stronger student engagement, JWU is committed to continuing its proactive approach to student success. By leveraging real-time data and AI-powered outreach, the university is ensuring that every student feels heard, supported, and empowered to thrive.

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Wildcat Willie has allowed us to work smarter, not harder. Instead of chasing down students who might need help, we now have students telling us exactly what they need. That shift has been a game-changer.

Derek Lavoie
Communications Specialist