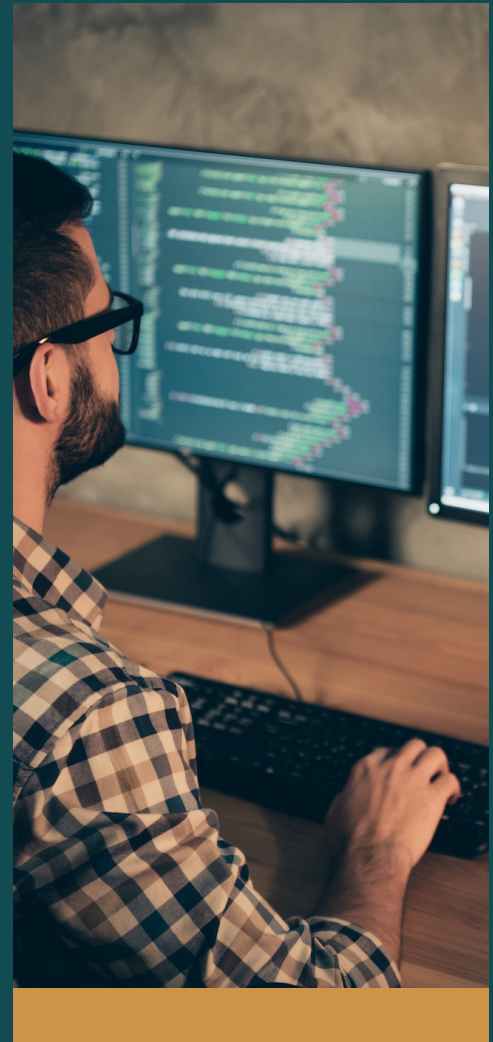




5 Key Initiatives for IT Decision Makers in Higher Ed for 2024

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Introduction

Higher education institutions are finding themselves at the forefront of a significant reset. Amid post-pandemic challenges, volatile financial landscapes, and an impending demographic cliff, these institutions have been forced to reassess how they operate. This recalibration extends to the crucial role of Information Technology (IT), which are fast becoming catalysts for aligning institutional goals in this evolving landscape.

A recent survey of higher education IT professionals highlights their top priorities:

1. **Impacting student success**
2. **Saving staff time and labor**
3. **Managing budgets**

These priorities underscore the transformative role that IT plays in shaping the future of higher education.

As IT leaders step into the spotlight to tackle student success and budget challenges, the need for powerful and reliable tools for data collection and analysis becomes apparent. That's where computer lab usage tracking software comes in. Hardware and software usage data, collected over time and across institutions, provides insights essential for driving change in higher education. By leveraging AI technologies, higher education IT teams can advance resource management, enhance security, and optimize user experience. These capabilities contribute to a proactive, efficient, and user-centric approach to computer resource management.

“Contemporary data sources and analysis and visualization tools are increasingly abundant and helpful. The challenge is to understand how to gain insights from these sources and then how to act on those insights.”

[2024 EDUCAUSE Top 10: Institutional Resilience](#)

INITIATIVE 1

Leverage Usage Data to Support Campus-Wide Goals for Student Success

A recent survey of higher education IT professionals showed that the top three initiatives in their roles, in priority order, are:

1. **Impacting student success**
2. **Saving staff time and labor**
3. **Managing budgets**

This initiative isn't new. In fact, it was the #2 issue listed in the [EDUCAUSE 2019 Top 10 IT Issues](#): "Student Success: Serving as a trusted partner with other campus units to drive and achieve student success initiatives."

University IT staff have the opportunity to enhance student success by determining what technology should be purchased and where it should be installed. In order to make data-driven decisions, IT teams must collect relevant and accurate data.

Computer lab license usage data is the key to understanding how specific groups of students currently use hardware and software on campus. By tracking obfuscated user activity in specific locations on campus, proactive IT teams can begin to build a picture of current activity. Then they can draw insights from the data to determine the best way to support the success of a wide range of students.

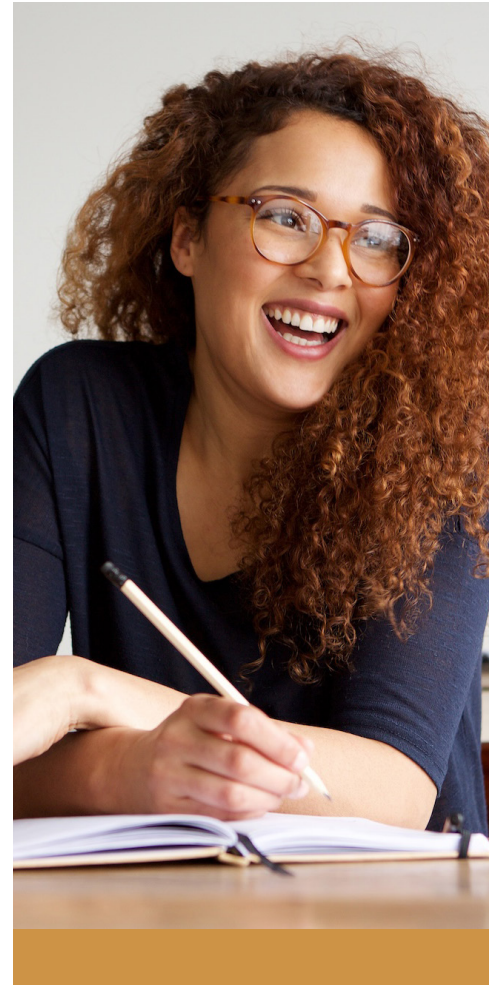
IT teams might address the unique needs of a diverse student population in the following ways:

- **First-year students:** IT leaders may focus resources for first-year students in the library, as it's often the default study space on an unfamiliar campus.
- **Pell Grant and Dream Act students:** IT leaders may pull back on the assumption that all students have powerful laptops and access to expensive software, and provide those resources strategically on campus for financial aid dependent students.
- **Single parent students:** IT leaders might create a dedicated computer lab near the campus daycare to allow single parents to maximize their time on campus.
- **Commuting students:** IT leaders may consider the schedule for public transportation when determining opening and closing hours for computer labs.

- **International students:** IT leaders might enhance support for international students by opening bookable study rooms, where students can collaborate and build community.
- **Grad students:** IT leaders may improve services for grad students by opening up hotdesks or quiet spaces with computers for focused work.

Higher education IT leaders can also impact Teaching Excellence and student outcomes Framework (TEF) scores at institutions that use the National Student Survey (NSS) by ensuring that IT initiatives are aligned with specific TEF objectives.

Understanding the unique needs of a diverse student population is the key to aligning IT projects with campus-wide goals for student success. The most effective way to understand those needs is through data, specifically hardware, software and obfuscated user data.



INITIATIVE 2

Maximize Agility to Alleviate Budget Pressure

For today's higher education CIOs, budget pressure is nothing new. The fiscal landscape of higher education has been marked by volatility. This volatility often has a downward trend. Revenue dips have come in many forms: a pandemic, lagging enrollment and state-wide budget cuts. But increases in funding resources can also wreak havoc when unpredicted. A rapid influx of funding may come too late to utilize or may lead to future budget pressure when the resource dries up.

"Predictability is crucial for effective planning and budgeting, and surprises can strain an institution or state system even in times of increased funding."

[Higher Ed's Financial Roller Coaster \(Chronicle.com\)](https://www.chronicle.com/article/higher-ed-financial-roller-coaster)

While complete elimination of volatility may be unrealistic, understanding and addressing this challenge becomes paramount in mitigating its adverse effects.

Agile IT teams armed with the right data are in a unique position to alleviate budget pressure in lean times and efficiently utilize resources as soon as they become available.

Agile IT teams can alleviate budget pressure by:

- Spending wisely and defending budget proposals
- Freeing up needed funding for important projects
- [Negotiating software contracts](#) with confidence
- Providing critical data in ongoing grant / funding submittals

The key to this agility is usage data.

Hardware and software usage data can inform a wide range of decisions, pushing and pulling the budget levers strategically and efficiently to maximize positive impact.

Higher education CIOs use LabStats to:

- Reduce software costs by right-sizing licenses to meet student demand
- Reallocate computers to areas of high demand
- Help students find available computers and software on campus
- Streamline staff hours and scheduling
- Analyze ROI on accessibility and technology resources
- Share data-driven insights with diverse teams

Pittsburg State University Success Story

Data can also be key to getting buy-in from essential stakeholders. Angela Neria experienced this first-hand when she used LabStats usage data to back up a proposed reduction in computer labs to a group of deans at Pittsburg State University.

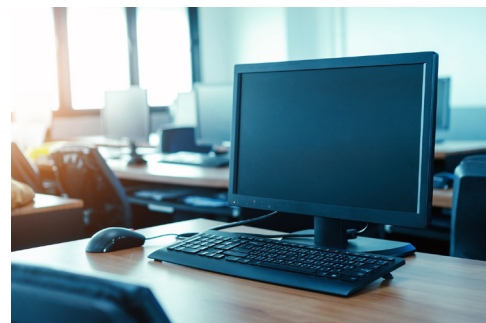
"I would say, how about I give you access and you run the numbers and see what you see. Being authentic and transparent helped so much with the buy-in."

Angela Neria, Pittsburg State University

Once the deans were on board, Angela and her committee were able to reduce and repurpose underutilized computer labs. The savings went straight back to the colleges for instructional purposes, including investing in specialty equipment, updating software packages or adding additional licenses.

Over 3 years, the university estimated a savings between \$700,000 and \$900,000 by reducing computer labs on campus while maintaining high user satisfaction.

As Pittsburg State demonstrated, usage data not only facilitates buy-in from essential stakeholders, but also enables institutions to repurpose resources, invest in instructional purposes, and achieve substantial cost savings over time. Whether facing budget pressure due to unforeseen events or grappling with the unpredictability of increased funding, usage data is an invaluable resource. Embracing a data-driven approach becomes imperative for CIOs navigating the financial roller coaster of higher education.



**Over 3 years,
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INITIATIVE 3

Make Data-Driven Decisions the Status Quo

As IT leaders begin to step into the spotlight to take on student success and budget challenges, they'll need powerful and reliable tools to collect and analyze data. In fact, data was listed as a key driver to better decisions in the [EDUCAUSE 2023 Top 10 IT Issues](#): "We've learned that data sparks insights and that insights lead to better decisions."

Hardware and software usage data, especially when collected over time and across an entire institution, can provide the necessary insights to drive change in higher education.

What data is available?

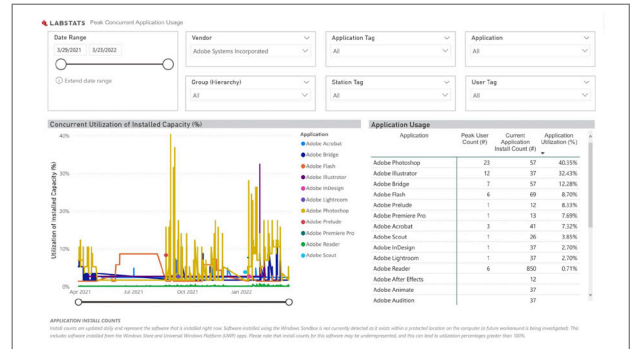
LabStats collects three categories of usage data:

1. Hardware
2. Software
3. User (Obfuscated)

Within the categories, data is marked by time and location, enabling a wide range of combinations that are relevant to higher education IT teams.

LabStats provides the following data points:

- Login count (by user, computer or location)
- Session start time, end time, duration



- Unique users who have logged in by location
- Utilization percentage of an application over time
- Usage time (of computers and applications)
- Application launch counts, times and duration
- Focus times of applications (sorts out background apps)
- Inventory of applications

How to visualize it

LabStats reports are easy to use and understand, and can be produced with just a few clicks. LabStats reports give IT teams decision-enabling hardware and software usage data without a burdensome ongoing time investment. Raw data and reports can be shared with permission levels or exported to keep all relevant stakeholders informed, regardless of technical proficiency.

LabStats' Power BI Dashboards are a quick-start option to data analysis at scale. The Software Usage Template enables IT teams to manage and optimize license expenditures with knowledge of when, where, and how applications are used. The Computer Usage Template enables teams to visualize meaningful location and allocation decisions with knowledge of where and when hardware is used.

The LabStats API is a powerful system that allows communication between LabStats and institution-owned business intelligence applications and tools. The ability to connect these separate systems is incredibly powerful and allows organizations to integrate data collected by LabStats into their own secure systems and processes to achieve new capabilities, automate processes, and more.

Key Actionable Insights

LabStats data can spark changes across higher education institutions that range from reducing budget pressure to optimizing physical space on campus to improving student perceptions of available resources.

Software Insights:

- Deploy software only to the locations where students need it
- Reduce image bloat by eliminating unused software in certain locations
- Identify and eliminate wasted software spend
- Renegotiate licensing purchases based on actual usage

Hardware Insights:

- Reallocate computers to areas of high demand
- Adjust hardware refresh schedules according to usage to keep heavy users happy and save money on rarely used equipment
- Verify that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) resources are available and used appropriately to prevent liability exposure
- Increase IT department efficiency by aligning service time-spend with hardware use



Significant goals can be achieved when these data insights turn into action. Consider how the following institutions used LabStats to make data-driven decisions.

- **Southern Cross University** reviewed usage data to [reallocate computer stations](#) and adjust software budgets to meet students' needs.
- **Pittsburg State University** identified wasted funds and created a plan to [save \\$900k](#) while simultaneously improving the student experience.
- **Boston University** learned what software they needed to make more available and how they could [maximize the impact of their IT budget investments](#).
- **Kean University** [redesigned computer lab layouts](#), adjusted lab schedules and resolved inventory problems.
- **Lewis and Clark College** [determined which labs to maintain](#), licenses to update, and how to deliver accurate reports on campus computer usage.
- **Texas Christian University** ran computer labs more smoothly and [made budgeting decisions](#) with each lab in mind.
- An east coast community college saved approximately \$600k on just one application and maintained user satisfaction.

Using data as a strategic asset, and campus IT software asset management as an avenue to making confident data-informed decisions, allows IT teams to achieve the holy grail of IT asset management: optimizing the budget and serving users better. Providing users what they need, where they need it, and when they need it, accomplishes this.

“Application tracking showed us where money would be well spent, and where it would be wasted.”

Sean Gillaspay, Mac Lab Manager, Texas Christian University

INITIATIVE 4

Sustain Innovation in a Changing World

IT teams play a significant role in advancing key university objectives, such as enhancing student success rates and ensuring budgetary efficiency through data-driven decision-making. The scope of goals and tasks encompasses diverse contexts and environments, with data serving as a crucial element in almost every project.

To meet this demand, proactive IT teams need to utilize both computer management software and computer monitoring software.

Computer management software should be utilized for the overall administration and maintenance of computer systems. Computer management software automates tasks and provides remote access to a group of computers. Management software is an essential tool to ensure computers are running properly.

Use computer management software to:

- Remotely control computers
- Restrict access to certain users
- Shut down, restart or log off remotely
- Update and configure the operating system
- Execute virus and vulnerability scans
- Install and manage software applications

On the other hand, computer monitoring software is specifically geared towards



observing and tracking computer activities, providing useful data to aid in decision-making.

Use computer monitoring software to:

- Identify opportunities to repurpose computer labs into classrooms
- See most and least used computers on campus
- Locations with the most logins
- Identify unused software applications
- Days/hours with the highest use of computers
- Accessibility resources are being used
- Provide data that proves compliance (ADA, Accessibility, 504, Title IX)

- Justify budget requests with usage data
- Identify outdated, unused, or vulnerable software that bogs down image size and creates security risks
- Spot check for unauthorized software downloads
- Target where to deploy software
- Update refresh schedule to match usage
- Compare usage of similar software
- Quickly find current IT inventory
- Identify computers that are not responding before students/staff create tickets
- Track individual student usage to fulfill lab requirements
- Verify faculty/staff are using requested resources
- Track ROI of special funding projects
- Collect data on the effectiveness of new approaches to providing IT resources such as loaner laptops, virtual desktops and group work spaces

LabStats has been providing data-as-a-service to higher education institutions for almost two decades by monitoring and reporting on hardware and software usage.. LabStats offers the most reliable and robust data, specifically tailored to the needs of college and university IT teams. In fact, the first version of LabStats was developed by a university lab manager, just trying to find a better way to do his job.

“In 20 years working in IT, I can’t think of a company that provides better service than LabStats.”

*Marco Mascari, CTO,
UCLA Graduate School of
Education*

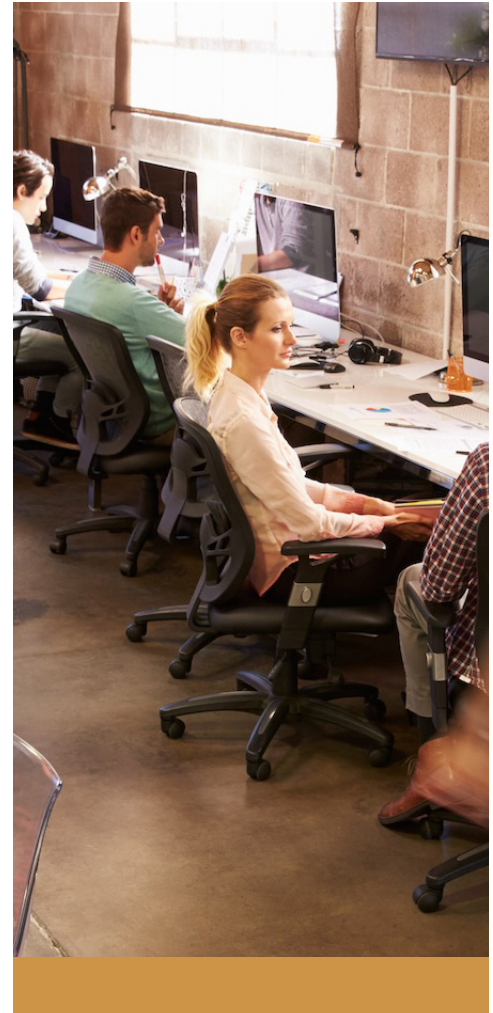
How LabStats stands out:

- The only purposefully built remote access solution specifically for higher education
- The only monitoring solution designed for [campus-wide reporting](#)
- Monitors more software by default than leading competitors
- Excels at physical lab usage reporting and tools
- The only solution designed to help students discover available computers both in person and remotely
- Provides a complete software licensing picture, others don’t.

- Cloud-based software does not require on-prem install like others
- The leading technical support in the industry, with real human interaction
- Supports both Windows and Mac environments, regardless of physical location and network enabling development on staff and faculty devices
- Offers robust API enabling integration to enterprise BI systems
- Enhances the overall efficiency, user experience, and management of computer resources within a university environment.
- Plays a crucial role in optimizing resources, improving decision-making, and ensuring that computing facilities align with the evolving needs of students and faculty

LabStats recently launched extended historical API endpoints and two Power BI Dashboard Templates to support large scale IT initiatives. With these new data points and dashboards, IT teams can analyze millions of hardware and software data points in minutes, and reach new levels of insights.

Colleges and universities are facing more pressure than ever before. With tightening budgets, cramped campuses and students' increasing demand for technology, knowing how hardware and software are being used is essential for current decision-making and future planning.



INITIATIVE 5

Discover How AI and Emerging Technology can Strategically Support Core Initiatives

The future is bright when considering the power and potential of integrating artificial intelligence with higher education IT initiatives.

“The power of AI is in the ability to handle vast volumes of data in microseconds, even approaching nanoseconds, with appropriate hardware and architecture in certain applications. Analysis, synthesis and predictive powers are offered by these tools at speeds and volumes that were unthinkable in the past.”

[Inside Higher Ed](#)

This is great news for institutions who are already on the path of using data to enhance student success, optimize budgets and expand data-driven decision making to a wide range of campus-wide initiatives.

Consider the additional capabilities and improved efficiency in monitoring and managing computer resources in a university setting with the help of AI tools:

Predictive Analytics

AI algorithms can analyze historical usage patterns and predict future demand for computer resources. This could be a great solution for IT teams to make adjustments to the hardware and software they provide at scale. This automation could free up time for CIOs to strategize custom solutions for student groups who may have specialized needs, including students who are first year, Pell Grant, Dream Act, single parents, commuters, international and grad.

Adaptive Scheduling

AI algorithms can optimize scheduling of maintenance tasks, updates, and system changes based on usage patterns. This can also save staff time and labor, identified as the second highest priority for higher education IT professionals in a recent survey. Adaptive scheduling can also minimize disruptions to students while ensuring the smooth operation of computer labs.

Budget Optimization

AI can provide cost optimization recommendations by analyzing hardware and software usage patterns at scale. It can suggest ways to maximize efficiency while minimizing expenses related to software licenses and hardware upgrades. With these recommendations, CIOs can make strategic moves more quickly in a volatile fiscal year. They can maximize unexpected funds, reduce spend quickly when resources are tight, and provide IT teams with the recommendations they need to be more agile in an ever-changing market.

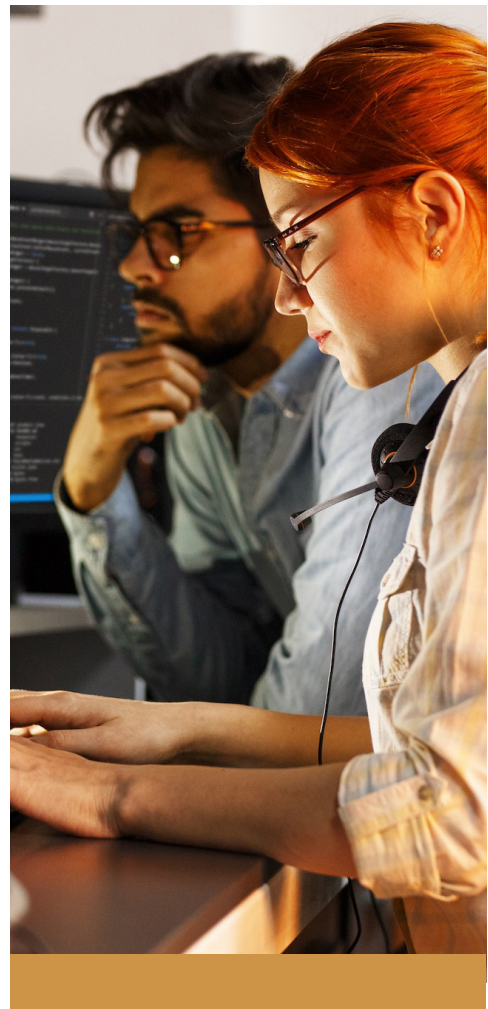
Anomaly Detection for Security

AI-powered anomaly detection can identify unusual patterns of behavior that may indicate security threats or unauthorized access. This enhances the capabilities of monitoring software like LabStats in maintaining a secure computing environment within the university.

Integration with Learning Systems

AI can facilitate better integration between LabStats and learning management systems, financial systems, inventory systems, security systems and utilities. It's already possible to combine LabStats data with other sources, but an AI-powered integration can help universities tailor computing resources to match the specific needs of different courses or academic programs.

By leveraging AI technologies, higher education IT teams can harness advanced capabilities for resource management, security, and user experience optimization. These enhancements contribute to a more proactive, efficient, and user-centric computer resource management solution.



Summary

In the evolving landscape of higher education, IT stands as a linchpin for institutions navigating the challenges of student success, budget management, and technological advancements. As the great higher education reset unfolds, embracing a data-driven approach and leveraging AI tools become imperative for driving positive change in the realm of higher education.

What is LabStats?

[LabStats](#) revolutionizes the way universities harness data insights to optimize their technology ecosystem. As a nimble, cloud-native solution, LabStats seamlessly integrates into campus infrastructure, empowering IT teams to effortlessly capture and analyze usage data across the entire campus network.

With a frictionless deployment process requiring minimal time investment, LabStats swiftly begins gathering valuable usage metrics, offering immediate visibility into software and hardware utilization trends. Its robust monitoring capabilities extend to hundreds of applications, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the software landscape. Leveraging insights gleaned from extensive collaborations with institutions worldwide, LabStats provides a tailored experience, streamlining the selection and tracking of software categories and applications during setup.

The flexibility of LabStats extends beyond its intuitive interface, empowering IT teams to customize reporting settings to align with institutional objectives. Whether exporting data to pre-configured Power BI templates or seamlessly integrating with internal analysis tools through the LabStats API, institutions can effortlessly tailor their data analysis workflows to suit their unique needs.

LabStats delivers organized usage data in a format that resonates with the institution's preferences. Through detailed hardware and software usage reports, IT teams gain actionable insights to drive data-driven decisions, optimize technology resource allocation, and streamline budget allocations, ultimately enhancing the student experience while maximizing operational efficiency.



For a no-pressure consultation about how LabStats can help your institution, [schedule a 15 min call](#) – we'll be happy to help.