



The New U

The Age of Continuous Connections in Higher Education

FOREWORD

Despite the enormous amount of disruption in higher education this year, we're seeing new business models emerge, increased speed and agility, and innovative ways to continuously connect like never before. Indeed, it seems a stronger, more agile, more strategic university model is rising above the COVID-19 crisis.

As millions of students, staff, and faculty across the globe continue to adjust to the pandemic's impact on education, you're collaborating like never before, breaking down silos, and building bridges to learn from one another. You are fast-tracking your digital transformation with resilience, agility, and speed.

Now, more than ever, institutions are exploring ways to support learners with a continuously connected experience, from the moment they express interest in an institution to the day they become engaged alumni.

This type of focused innovation in education requires the courage and creativity to take leaps at some of the most entrenched "truths" we hold as institutions. The curriculum, spaces, tools, roles, infrastructure all offer an immense opportunity for digital transformation to make a difference.

If higher ed institutions truly seize the opportunities offered by digital transformation, they must become more willing to think outside its incumbent boxes. It's time to rethink the ways we harness data, develop models for uncertain times, engage learners over a lifetime.

Many of these ideas are explored in *The New U*, where you can learn how and why it's critical to create a technology-enabled, integrated, customized, and continual experience throughout the learner lifecycle. We hope it sets you and your students on a path to greater success and learning.



Nathalie Mainland

Senior Vice President & General Manager, Education Cloud
[Salesforce.org](https://www.salesforce.org)

About the author

Jeffrey Selingo is an author of four books on higher education, the latest, *Who Gets In and Why: A Year Inside College Admissions* (2020). You can find out more about him at jeffselingo.com.

Teresa Flannery, co-author of Chapter 2, is a higher education leader, consultant, and author of *How to Market a University: Building Value in a Competitive Environment*, to be published by The Johns Hopkins University Press in January 2021.

CONTENTS

Overview

The Age of Continuous Connections in Higher Education [page 4](#)

Chapter 1

Developing Differentiated Models for Uncertain Times [page 13](#)

Chapter 2

Harnessing Data to Develop an Integrated Marketing Strategy [page 23](#)

Chapter 3

Recruiting and Engaging Generation Z [page 33](#)

Chapter 4

The Key Role of Faculty in Designing the Student-Centered University [page 43](#)

Chapter 5

Engaging Lifelong Relationships [page 57](#)



The traditional college campus has long been a collection of individual and powerful fiefdoms: academic departments and schools, and sprawling administrative units divided between academic, business, and student affairs.

Historically, students completed college by navigating a series of handoffs between these domains — from the admissions office to the registrar and bursar, then to their academic department, and finally alumni affairs.

This system worked for generations because college didn't cost too much. If students wandered through school and took an extra year or two to graduate, they were sometimes congratulated for exploring and finding their passions. If someone dropped out, they could still land a good-paying job without a degree. Maybe they'd return to school, but not doing so wasn't seen as the institution's failure.

But over the last three decades, those attitudes started to shift, as tuition skyrocketed and a college degree became *the* entry ticket into a middle-class

career. Student success moved from the periphery of campus priorities to a central space in strategic plans. At the same time, campuses began to upgrade their financial and academic operations from legacy analog systems to digital records, department by department.

The problem is that digitization has largely stayed siloed within campus divisions. Its introduction unfortunately hasn't accelerated the digitalization process, which fundamentally changes how students and colleges engage and interact and results in a genuine digital transformation.

Rather, what's happening on most campuses is that students and faculty interact only episodically with each other, after seeking out services they need, such as advising appointments or grades. Admissions

records don't link up with the registrar, and neither connects to learning management systems in the classroom. As a result, few institutions have a complete picture of how students maneuver their way through college, and most important, where they might be getting stuck or frustrated (see Figure 1). For their part, students have to go to multiple offices on campuses to ask for help, repeating their story over and over again.

"Campuses have spent years collecting and cleaning the data," said Jennifer Engle, a deputy director at the Gates Foundation, who leads its team responsible for data, measurement, learning, and evaluation in higher education. "Now they need to actually use it to fix problems."

Higher education seems to be on the cusp of a seismic shift in how students, faculty, and staff interact with their institutions, and with each other. Digitally savvy colleges and universities are beginning to connect all those dots between campus functions by establishing data warehouses that gather activities across divisions through robust customer relationship management systems (CRMs), sometimes in real time.

Thanks to new cloud-based technologies that allow more frequent and customized interactions, institutions can form deeper ties all along a student's lifecycle, from before they arrive on campus through their lives as alumni. Instead of waiting for students to come to them for help — if they ever do — campus officials can identify student needs as they arise, which improves retention and student engagement, as well as makes campus services more efficient and potentially lowers costs.

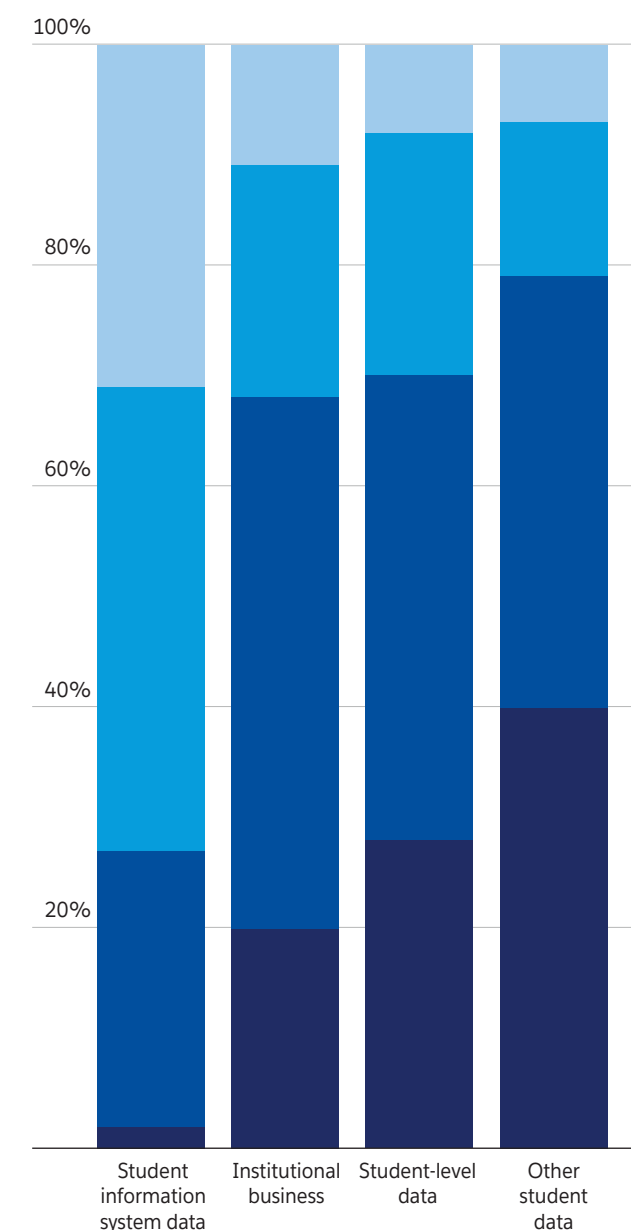
Welcome to *The New U*. What's innovative here is not the technology used, but the ways colleges are following the retail and service sectors in deploying that technology to make the student and alumni experience seamless. Think of the underlying technologies in Amazon one-click, Spotify recommendations, or the Apple Watch's health tracking all being used in higher education.

FIGURE 1
Ways to Go Toward the Connected Campus

Adoption and integration of data between campus offices and divisions is not as common as it may seem.

The State of Integration

- Data is systematically collected, integrated, and used
- Data is systematically collected, integrated
- Data is collected but not integrated
- Institution does not collect usable data



Source: Educause, Top 10 IT Issues, 2019



Although years behind most consumer-product companies, colleges and universities are beginning to take significant steps to form wider and deeper ties with students.

Consider the technology that tracks visitors to the one-stop student center on the Lowell campus of the University of Massachusetts, which houses the registration, financial aid, and payment offices. Applications help staff members across those divisions log every interaction, so their colleagues can see how questions were answered elsewhere, reducing student wait times and frustration. Similarly, faculty and staff members at the University of South Florida are sharing hundreds of data points across academic and administrative departments to flag at-risk students, allowing the university to substantially raise its graduation rate in recent years.

Elsewhere, Arizona State University is using technology to share and verify academic records to make

“The academy used to layer technology on top of historical functions and built those systems vertically, too. Now, we’re building them horizontally across campus giving us a view of the entire constituent experience. It’s totally a different mindset.”

Brad Wheeler
Former VP for Information Technology and CIO
Indiana University

transferring from the state’s community colleges easier for students. Even alumni affairs is getting into the game. The University of California at San Francisco sends customized email messages by class year and school for reunions and then shapes follow-up

messages based on how alumni respond, increasing participation in events and fundraising.

Using technology to enable frequent interactions with students “will be the defining feature of higher education in the coming decade,” said Brad Wheeler, vice president for information technology and chief information officer at Indiana University. “The academy used to layer technology on top of historical functions and built those systems vertically, too. Now, we’re building them horizontally across campus giving us a view of the entire constituent experience. It’s totally a different mindset.”

THE IMPERATIVE FOR THE STUDENT LIFECYCLE

Driving the demand for this connected student experience are four simultaneous forces bearing down

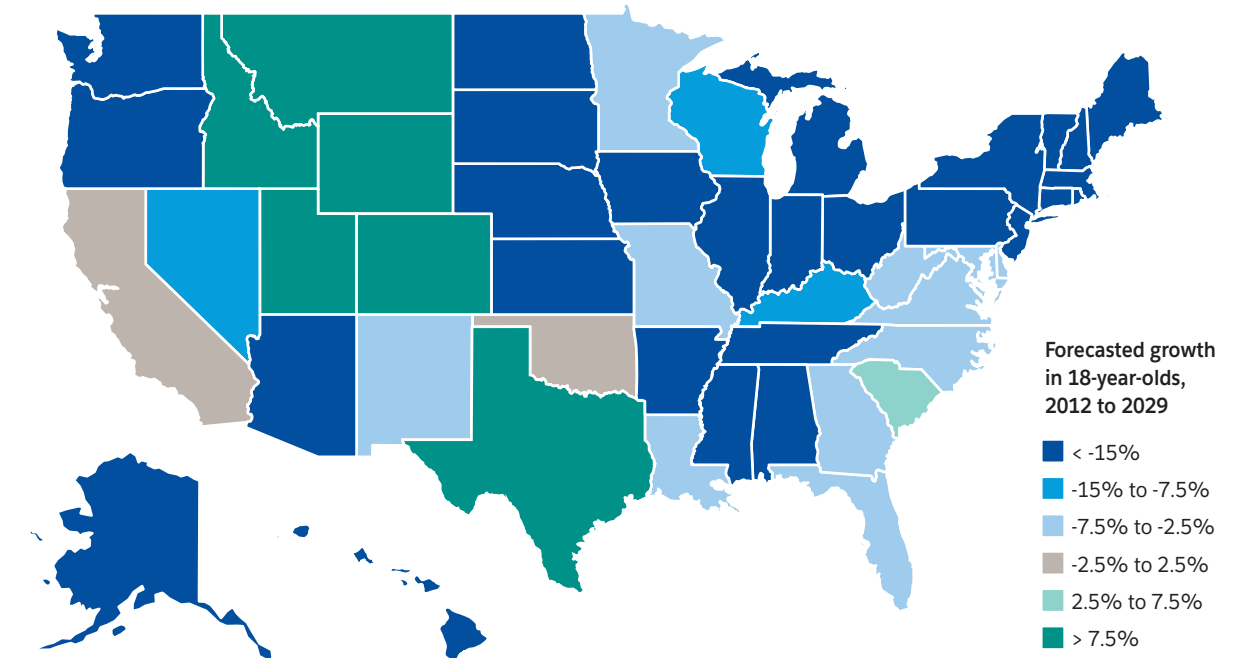
on higher education, pressuring campus leaders to try something different.

First, student demographics are shifting. After a lengthy period of continued growth in the number of high-school graduates, the U.S. is headed into a decade of stagnation (see Figure 2). The coming generation of high-school graduates will be more racially and ethnically diverse than any cohort of students that higher education has previously served, requiring new strategies to recruit them, enroll them, and see them to graduation. This demographic forecast also comes at a time when college affordability is reaching crisis proportions: Some 84 percent of Americans think higher education is going in the wrong direction, according to polling by the Pew Research Center, and they cite high tuition costs as the main reason.

FIGURE 2

Changing Demographics

The number of 18-year-old, college-going students is expected to decline in much of the country through 2029. But even as this “traditional” demographic shrinks, there are 95 million prospective adult students: people who have finished high school but never gone to college, attended college but not obtained a degree, or earned an associate degree but not a bachelor’s.



Source: Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education by Nathan B. Grawe

Second, students are coming to higher education with varying aspirations. The population of learners in the college pipeline come from Generation Z (born since the mid-1990s) and they have different motivations and mindsets for what they want out of their experience (see Figure 3) than their parents did. These students are accustomed to finding answers right away on Google. They seek uninterrupted entertainment on their phones and tablets. They want customization like they have on Amazon, and the instant communication of texting and status updates means they expect faster feedback from everyone, on everything.

Third, the adult student market is splintering. Just as the number of high-school graduates is falling in much of the U.S., the demand for education and upskilling among adults is growing. But no longer can institutions think of these adults as a monolithic group of learners. Their purposes for enrolling in college courses, how they want to learn, and what kind of credential they want differ. At the same time, some employers are now providing education as a benefit

like health care — take, as an example, the well-publicized deal between Starbucks and Arizona State University — and demanding more oversight of their tuition reimbursement dollars as a result. Colleges that fail to understand the splintering of the adult market and don't align their institutions with the needs of

Where the Words Matter

The “digital campus” is a bit of a misnomer, with three phases that are often conflated among college leaders.

Digitization: the conversion of analog to digital.

Digitalization: the use of digital technologies to change how work gets done.

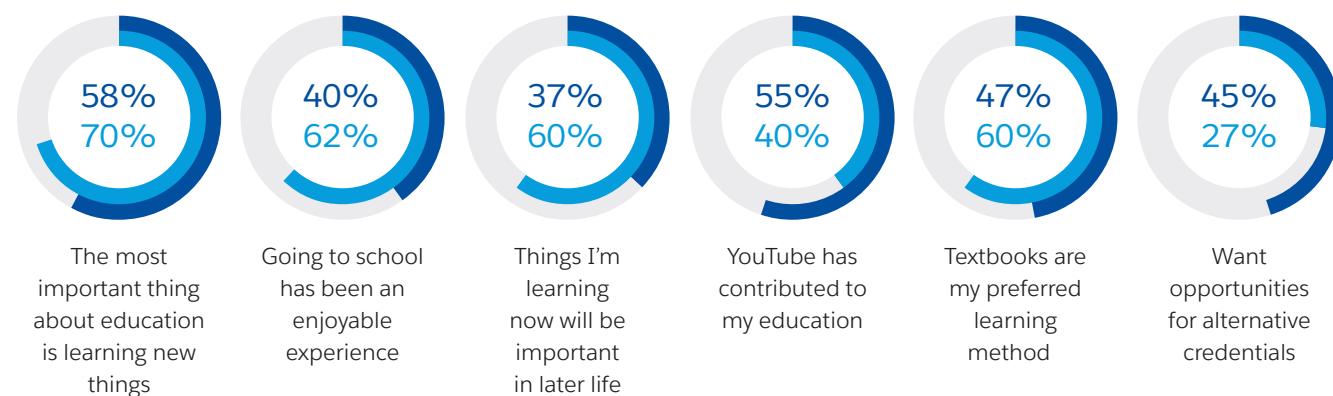
Digital Transformation: how students and institutions engage and interact to create successful pathways through higher education.

Source: Gartner IT Glossary

FIGURE 3
Changing Motivations of Learners

As generations change, so do their motivations and mindsets for learning. The leading edge of Generation Z (born between 1996 and 2012) is now in college, and the purpose and goals of higher education for them are different than they were for the Millennial Generation. Millennials (born between 1981 and 1995) now make up the largest cohort of adult learners.

Among the differences: ■ Gen Z ■ Millennials



Source: The Harris Poll, 2018: online survey of 2,587 respondents, 14 to 40-years old

different learner segments will flounder in attracting lifelong learners.

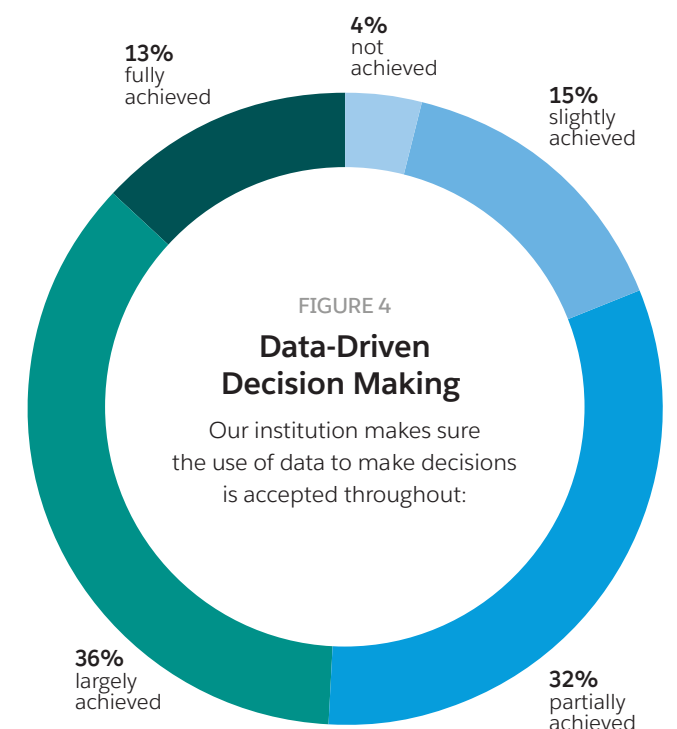
Finally, there is increasing attention on the value of a degree and the outcomes institutions are producing. More and more, students and their families are factoring in the return on investment of a college degree when they decide where to enroll. Armed with new tools on earnings by college and major, students are voting with their feet. Institutions can no longer depend on public trust in the value of their product. They need to show how academic programs are relevant to the job market and highlight outcomes to prospective students by telling stories of student success augmented by solid data. Similarly, state and federal governments, along with accreditors, are demanding more accountability from institutions. Without a strategy that connects campus systems, institutions can't provide the answers regulators and legislators are looking for nor can the institution provide the value the student wants.

At the foundation of the connected campus is a constant data stream about students that can be analyzed for insight and patterns. Those findings, in turn, can help colleges transform the student journey into a long-lasting relationship instead of the episodic one it often is now. “Data-driven decisions are taking precedence on campuses,” said Richard DeMillo, director of Georgia Tech's Center for 21st Century Universities, “replacing the old model of administrators sitting around a conference table thinking they know what's wrong and how to fix it.” (see Figure 4)

By learning from existing interactions, campuses can shape future ones for students. That will allow institutions to make adjustments to how they recruit students, what they offer to students while on campus, and the ways they remain connected as alumni.

THE NEW STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

Campuses are drowning in data: information about visits to university websites, student posts in classroom discussion boards, grades in learning management systems, and card swipes in the dining hall. Corraling



Source: Educause, Top 10 IT Issues, 2019

all that information and making sense of it proves a daunting task.

Indeed, making better use of student data is among the top five technology priorities for universities, according to a survey by the Campus Computing Project. Some 60 percent of technology leaders in higher education call it a “very important” priority. But with so much information available to them, where do college leaders even begin to use data in the transformation of their campuses? How should universities mine and track data to improve student success, make their institutions more efficient, and better demonstrate their outcomes?

My research and in-depth interviews with more than two dozen university leaders and technologists has identified four key areas where institutions can apply data and deploy digital tools to build a connected and continuous relationship with students:

1. ENROLLMENT AND ACADEMIC PLANNING

The connected campus enables colleges to better identify student markets, align academic programs with demand, and personalize student services.

Right now, colleges' strategic enrollment plans tend to follow what's familiar to them or what's popular in higher education. So, colleges try to dig deeper in geographic markets where their brand name is already known to recruit students or follow competitors to new locales with growing numbers of high-school graduates, such as California, Texas, and Florida.

When building new academic programs, they look to competitors for ideas or develop majors in academic fields adjacent to what they're already doing. They might develop a global commerce major, for instance, to supplement what they're already doing in business and international affairs or a physician-assistant degree because the institution is well known for its health-sciences programs.

Here's where gathering and gleaning insights from data can help push a campus in an innovative direction. This strategy involves finding students who are a good match and providing them with the mix of academic programs they want or need. It starts with identifying the attributes of the students already succeeding on your campuses – those who graduated on time with high student engagement and satisfaction scores. Armed with that information, institutions can find students in new geographic areas much like the best students already on campus. The theory behind this data mining is the same one that drives the invisible array of algorithms that recommend music on Spotify, movies on Netflix, or personalized ads that show up on web pages.

A similar approach can be used for academic planning and even student affairs. Looking at data on course enrollments, learning outcomes, and student engagement in campus activities can help institutions better understand their real curricular and co-curricular strengths — rather than just those

Top Obstacles to The New U...

In my research, college leaders and technologists frequently pointed to a common set of challenges (and solutions).

- Each department and division houses their own data, and institutions often lack a common taxonomy across campus
- Colleges have the ability to collect the data, but lack the in-house expertise to use it effectively
- Faculty often would rather devote their time to publishing and landing grants than using data to improve their teaching

...and top solutions

- Appoint a czar who reports to the president to mandate ownership and guidelines for cleaning up data
- Create data fellows who are trained in data analytics and embedded in campus departments
- Build a hospitable environment for professors to experiment with data-driven teaching

they *perceive* to be an advantage. By recognizing their strengths, institutions can match those core competencies to real-time labor market data to build new academic programs or double down on co-curricular activities, such as co-ops, undergraduate research, or athletics.

Making better use of the data colleges are gathering can also help them understand at a granular level what their students are actually learning and tease out the skills that matter in the job market. Research shows that a student's major doesn't necessarily determine where she ends up in a career: skills that can be picked up in various majors matter more in preparing students for jobs in fields like sales, marketing, training, and management, which are all now in high demand.

In the end, institutions that learn from the data they gather on their students can differentiate themselves and tailor their recruitment pitches and academic offerings, instead of providing a one-size-fits-all education that is fast becoming financially unsustainable.

2. STUDENT SUCCESS

The pressure is on colleges for higher graduation rates, better retention, and more engaged students. Putting data in the hands of faculty and staff members empowers them to make data-driven decisions when revamping advising structures, revising curricular requirements, and designing more-active teaching methods.

Perhaps the most common use of student data right now is in holistic approaches to academic advising. Predictive-analytics software allows advisers to identify at-risk students by looking at academic performance throughout the semester. Rather than wait for students to come to them, advisers can reach out at the first sign of trouble in a course, helping to move the needle on retention and graduation rates on many campuses. Beyond alerts, the systems also make it easier for students to know who to reach out to for course planning and career readiness, and such information is shared across teams.

Similarly, data is being used by some institutions to better distribute financial aid where it will make the most difference in student success. By scouring their financial records, universities can find students with unpaid bills worth a few hundred dollars — but who have good grades and only a semester or two left to graduate — and give them small grants so they can register for classes and eventually complete school.

To build a truly connected campus, however, requires the involvement of faculty members to work in parallel with new technologies. On too many campuses, courses operate as they have for centuries. Classroom discussions, if they happen at all, are brief. In measuring whether their teaching is actually getting through, professors tend to rely on grades, student

evaluations, and other old-fashioned methods that often don't come until the end of the semester.

A more continuous system would pipe in data from learning-management systems and combine it with information from student interactions with advisers to provide real-time insights to professors about teaching techniques that are not working and concepts that students are failing to grasp.

3. STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS

It used to be that institutions themselves ran all their campus operations from parking lots to dining halls. Over time, however, campus functions were outsourced as institutions increasingly focused on their core mission of teaching and research.

In recent years, these relationships have become more complex, resulting in public-private partnerships where companies typically finance and operate critical campus functions. The most common one is student housing. But more and more these partnerships are expanding into activities closer to the academic core, such as recruiting international students and managing online programs.

The decade ahead will demand that universities be more agile and deliberate about where to direct limited financial resources. By connecting data from siloed departments across campus and stand-alone experiences that students have, institutions can learn from existing interactions to make the right set of strategic investments. If a university sees students spend most of their time in common spaces, it can work with partners to design buildings with those uses in mind. If an institution notices an abundance of employees from a local company enrolling in courses, it can approach that employer about degrees tailored exclusively to its workers.

The more data colleges collect and analyze in a connected campus, the better the institution will understand the motivations and mindsets of its students. The more data universities collect, the more powerful the feedback loop will become in

creating strategic investments for the future — helping institutions differentiate themselves and thrive.

4. LIFETIME AFFILIATION

The college campus has long been conceived of as a physical place that a student enters at a particular time in her life and leaves when a degree is completed. But increasingly, colleges and universities are turning into platforms for lifelong, continual education — to help people keep current in a career, to learn how to complement rising levels of automation, and to gain skills for new work (see Figure 5).

No longer will students “enroll” then “graduate” and become “alumni.” Those terms one day might become outdated. Instead, learners will have an affiliation with an institution throughout their lives. That affiliation will be social and professional, much as it is today, but also educational. Learners will see colleges and universities as providers of constant, always-on education and training that can be consumed in short spurts much like they use Netflix and YouTube today for entertainment.

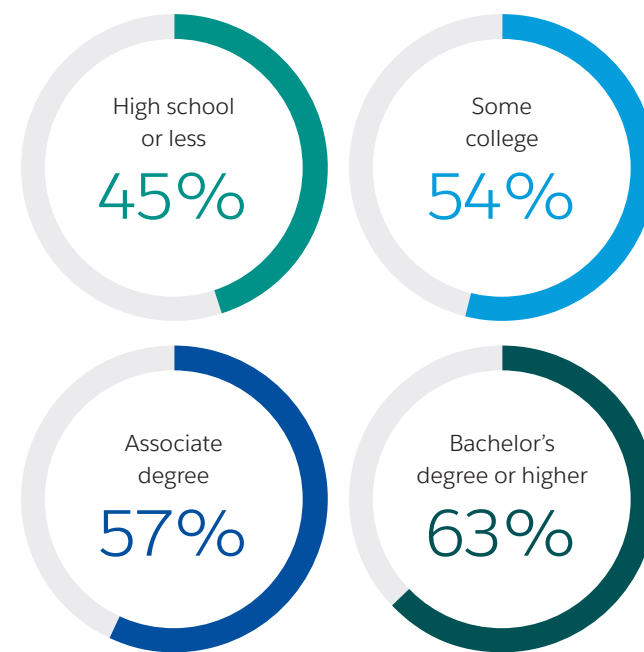
To implement this lifetime affiliation approach well, institutions will need to have a rich flow of information from students that dates back to when they first associated with the campus. The more a college knows about students throughout their lifetimes, the better they can customize interactions with them.

Here’s how this approach might work for Julie, a student who has completed a traditional undergraduate degree. Because the university has been collecting data on Julie’s interactions with the campus since she applied, they know the courses, the activities, and even the skills she acquired while an undergraduate. Armed with that information, the university can suggest critical updates to her training and certifications, much like we get alerts in our cars today when they need service. When Julie ends up working as a freelancer, the university can act like an employer by giving feedback on professional development opportunities — suggesting courses and training, as well as traditional networking events

FIGURE 5

A Desire for Lifelong Learning

Adults with higher levels of education are more likely to say it will be essential for them to get training and develop new skills throughout their work lives.



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 25-June 29, 2016. "The State of American Jobs," Pew Research Center

that can be customized to her professional field and location.

By linking disparate areas of campus together, institutions have the ability to better meet the needs and desires of students throughout their lifetimes, in the moment. The knowledge gained through the connected campus can lead institutions to boost efficiencies, cut costs, and most of all, offer services and products we can’t even imagine today, helping to develop critical long-lasting and trusted relationships with learners.



CHAPTER

1

Developing Differentiated Models for Uncertain Times



When you think of the quintessential college campus, the picture that probably comes to mind is of a leafy quad surrounded by neo-Gothic buildings and filled with young adults fresh out of high school.

This image of the residential, place-based experience is so ingrained in our minds because it is the model adopted by thousands of higher-education institutions in the United States.

Rather than differentiate at the core, institutions tend to adapt the model on the margins — around their size, research agenda, and the mix of graduate and academic programs they offer. Indeed, colleges are “eerily similar in vision,” wrote the late Doug Toma of the University of Georgia’s Institute of Higher Education in 2012.¹ “They not only portray their ambitions using similar rhetoric but also operationalize them through a rather generic set of approaches.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the shortcomings of this standard model. For one, the

uniqueness of a residential campus in a specific geographic location is diminished by distance education. It’s difficult to differentiate your institution’s brand from another college’s when everyone is at home learning online. While students will return to physical campuses en masse one day, the new normal in higher education is likely to be a mix of online and in-person.

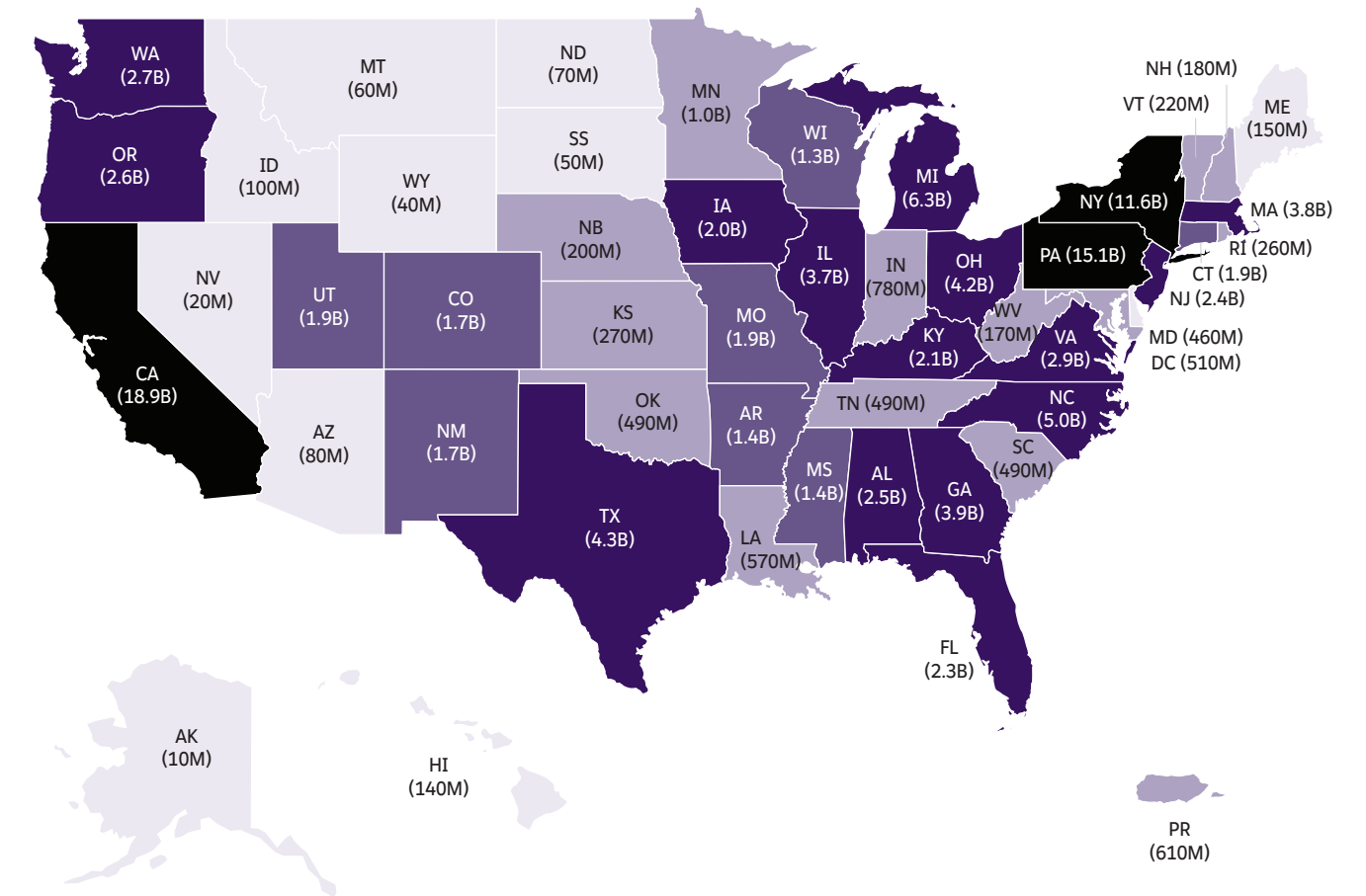
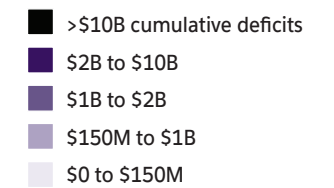
What’s more, the pandemic has wreaked havoc on institutional budgets, revealing the need for schools to have diversified revenue streams, and thus a diversity of products that provide a clear return on investment to learners (*see Figure 1*). Finally, COVID-19 has accelerated broader shifts in the economy resulting in the need for working adults to access additional education.

FIGURE 1

A New Financial Normal for Higher Ed

If remote education continues through some or much of 2021, institutional budget models built on residential education will continue to be challenged.

Cumulative deficit in dollars



Cumulative projected deficit in billions of dollars, by institution type

Total: \$118B



Note: Includes only institutions with projected 2020-21 deficit

Source: McKinsey & Company

“We need to adopt the notion that innovation is more important than tradition.”

Michael Crow
President of Arizona State University

The challenge for colleges as they plan for a post-pandemic future is to set themselves apart as whole institutions rather than stake their future on a handful of new academic programs, a revised recruitment strategy, or a bolstered set of online offerings. When times get tough, colleges tend to hunker down and wring more out of their strategic plans and focus more on executing what they're already doing.

When times get tough, colleges tend to hunker down and wring more out of their strategic plans and focus more on executing what they're already doing.

That strategy might have worked before COVID-19 when higher education as an industry plodded along. But the fiscal and demographic realities on the near horizon call for greater differentiation with the development of distinctive pathways and services for learners throughout their lifetime. Colleges need to step away from the herd in meaningful ways. That doesn't mean they have to throw away all the markings of the legacy model (i.e., residential education), but it does require a real distinction in the marketplace. Without it, institutions are squandering opportunities to thrive — and for some, to survive — in the decade ahead.

“We are still in a world where every college and every university and every community college is trying to copy each other and to solve every problem themselves,” says Michael Crow, president of Arizona State University. “We need to adopt the notion that innovation is more important than tradition.”

It's not only the outputs that set innovative universities apart from their competitors. Sure, Arizona State regularly tops the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings of the “most innovative universities.” But it has done so by essentially rethinking every business function, every process students encounter, every academic program on campus over the last decade-plus and then using technology such as data analytics, predictive modeling, and adaptive learning to deliver a more student-centered experience.

This is the foundation of *The New U* — a paradigm shift in what institutional leaders believe higher education should be, broadly speaking, and then shaping the unique capability of their institution to deliver on that promise. In recent years, a handful of institutions, including Arizona State University, Georgia State University, Western Governors University, Southern New Hampshire University, Northeastern University, and Indian River State College in Florida, among others, have built a slate of unique products that allowed them to get a head start and more easily pivot in the midst of the pandemic.

Look at Lorain County Community College in Ohio, which since 2013 has moved the needle on student success by building strategies rooted in data with the help of a network of other institutions. That effort to rethink how Lorain operated proved to be a lifeline in the pandemic.

“We've worked hard to build data systems so that we were all working from a common set of assumptions when COVID hit,” says Marcia Ballinger, Lorain's president. “What we learned during the pandemic is that we can pivot our tools and platforms to support students remotely as well as in person.”

IN NEW DISTINCTIVE MODELS, ELEMENTS OF COMMONALITY

Higher education has faced many disruptive events throughout its history — world wars, recessions, and pandemics — and each time the traditional model rooted in the founding days of the country has survived. There's no question that it will again this time; but what's on the mind of college leaders is whether it will prosper everywhere?

In interviews with more than three dozen university presidents, provosts, and board members in the spring and summer of 2020, I found that unlike recent disruptive events — namely the 2008 Great Recession — the coronavirus has impacted nearly every corner of campus and every student in some way. Among students, COVID-19 has affected the emotional and mental preparedness to return to campus for nearly half of students, and for one-third of them, their academic preparedness (see Figure 2).

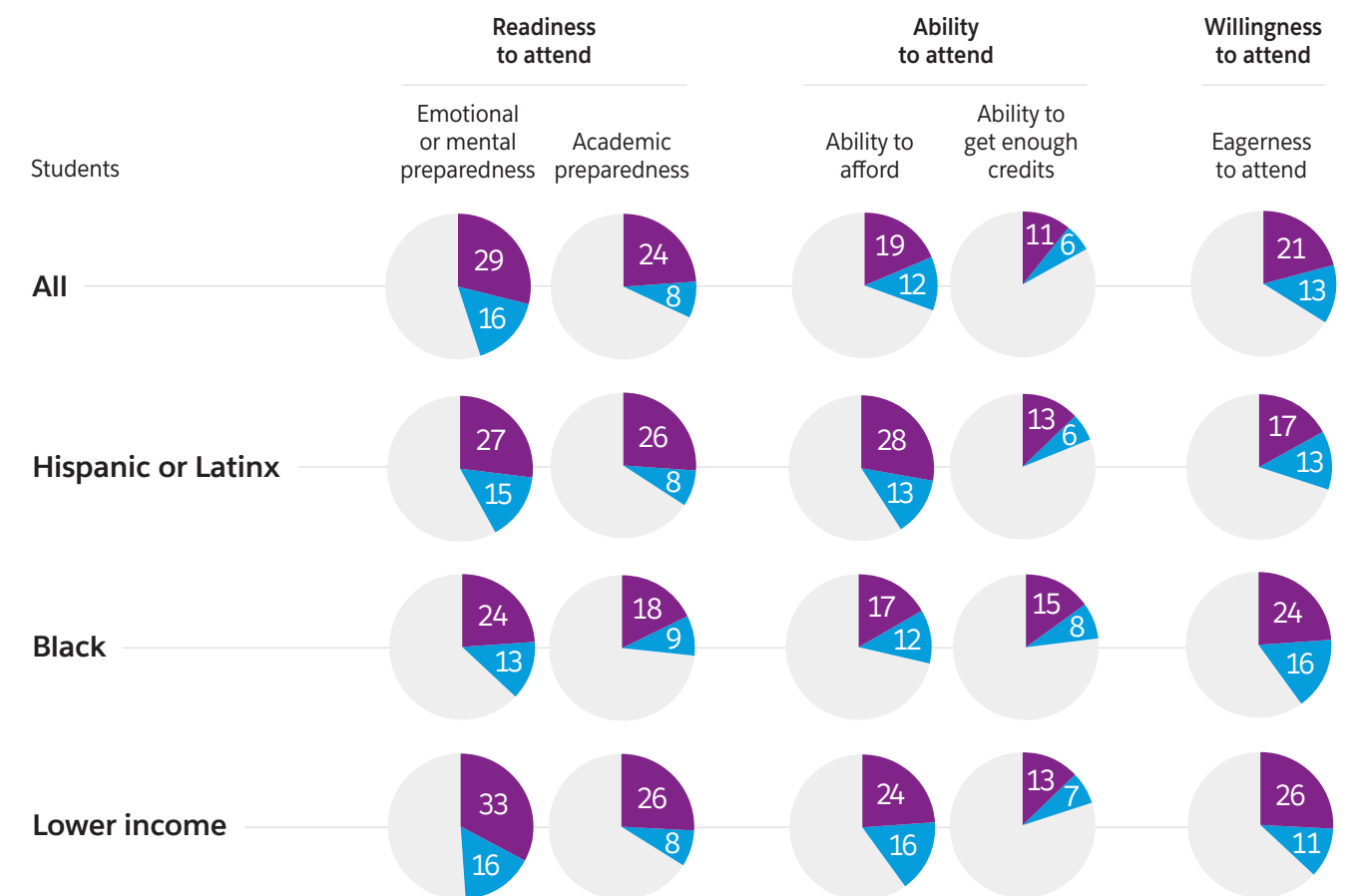
FIGURE 2

New Challenges to Student Success

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the academic, mental, and financial well-being of students. New institutional models will need to meet students where they are. A significant portion of students may continue to be at risk in terms of readiness, ability, and willingness to enroll.

Level of reported impact on college preparedness factors, and percentage of respondents

■ Had a strong impact
■ Had an extremely strong impact



Source: McKinsey & Company

Notes: Figures may not sum, because of rounding

While new institutional models must offer more diversity than they do today, they also should have a few things in common.

First, they should meet the known needs of students. That means making decisions based on data about current students as well as new segments of students colleges want to attract. Too often in higher education, decisions are based on the gut instincts of administrators. Best-in-class institutions have cleaned up and organized their data so that everyone on campus is starting with a common set of facts and the importance of an incremental improvement on various metrics is well understood.

Second, the models need to provide value for the money spent with three basic attributes: affordability, functionality, and emotional (see Figure 3). Given the price of higher education, the return on the investment in a credential is almost exclusively now seen by learners of all ages through the prism of the workforce. Will my education lead to a job, to a promotion, or to an entirely new career? As a result, academic programs and student services should be designed around the dual demands of the 21st century workforce: short-term credentials that provide specific skills as well as foundational programs that instill much-needed soft skills, such as problem solving, creativity, and critical thinking.

Third, the models need to be sustainable. The heart of differentiation is an institution's ability to develop a distinctive set of experiences on a consistent basis.

Fourth, the designs need to build toward resilient institutions. As ASU's Crow points out, the coronavirus is only one of many potential disruptions, from climate change to economic shifts, facing higher education in the future. Resilient institutions can pivot more quickly to respond to such changes.

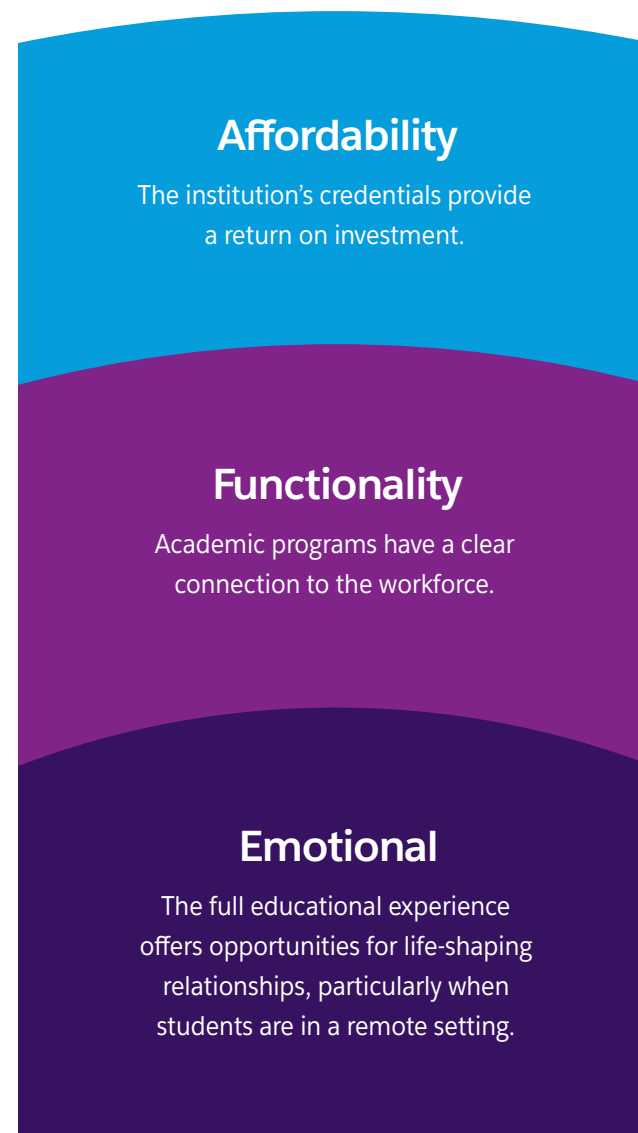
The most likely feature of these differentiated models is that at their core they will no longer resemble the bundled product that has been the hallmark of higher education for centuries — a bundle which has partly

driven its rising costs. If the pandemic has taught higher education anything, it is that there are ways to separate classroom instruction from the residential-based coming-of-age experience.

While this unbundling hasn't worked perfectly in the midst of a global crisis, if well designed it holds the promise of reducing costs. "If you decouple the enrichment and social interaction from the academics,

FIGURE 3

The Basic Building Blocks of Future Models



it provides opportunities for more hybrid instruction, for more competency-based degrees that aren't tied to time spent in a seat," says Paul LeBlanc, president of Southern New Hampshire University.

THREE EMERGING MODELS

My research has identified three models that are feasible in the near term. It's unlikely any one model will take hold in the same way as the legacy, four-year residential model has in the U.S. But the trio of approaches that follow are designed to serve as building blocks for the future of institutions.

These ideas shouldn't be taken as exhaustive or prescriptive, but rather as prompts to drive discussion and new ideas for institutions. Leaders shouldn't think they need to pick one as a single pathway forward. Rather, these design principles provide an opportunity for institutions to mix and match models, have them overlap, and evolve them over time.

1. IMMERSIVE HYBRID

In this model, the digital and physical worlds are fused. While hybrid education is often defined as a student taking an online course while living on campus, the Immersive Hybrid strategy is much more extensive in its reach. It moves both elements of in-classroom learning as well as endeavors outside the classroom to the virtual environment while high-impact activities remain in the physical world.

The foundation of this approach is to determine which experiences are best served in the physical space and those that can be better delivered in the digital space. It might include academic and career advising, mental health counseling, and certain courses or individual classes that meet less often face-to-face. In many ways, this model follows that of online retailers such as Bonobos and Warby Parker, which use relatively small physical outlets to spark sales on their websites and increase customer loyalty.

Yet some 40 years after the introduction of the personal computer to college campuses, institutions are still agonizing over whether to make significant

investments in digital technology a top campus-wide priority. Instead, they often manage them as separate entities rather than making them the single way students expect to navigate their college experience.

In an Immersive Hybrid model, a student might start courses and orientation online the summer before their first year and then take on-campus classes in the fall as they connect with faculty members in-person and an academic advisor online. On the physical campus, they could write for the student newspaper, join the environmental association, or play club soccer, while at the same time shadow online an alumna employed in the marketing profession a few states away to learn needed career skills.

A campus that has embraced the Immersive Hybrid model thinks systematically about each piece of the student experience. It develops innovative components and weaves them into a holistic system that distinguishes them from competitors and serves new segments of students. By focusing the infrastructure and people on campus to those services that need to be delivered face-to-face, institutions can reduce costs by building scale and efficiency with online services.

Like online retailers that perfected their services in the digital space before opening physical outposts, the Immersive Hybrid template might be best illustrated by online institutions that, by the nature of their model, were forced to design in a virtual world what had long been in-person higher education services.

Take, for example, the holistic support platform at Western Governors University, which includes enrollment, faculty, support services, and financial aid. It's designed to deliver the right resources at the right time and provides a complete view of the student journey, serving as a blueprint for brick-and-mortar universities that want to move services beyond the classroom to an online environment.

2. FLEXIBLE PATHWAY

The assumption that college education is a four-year linear path is baked into the American culture.



Colleges in the colonial days were founded on the premise of a four-year degree, a concept imported from Europe. Harvard University experimented with a three-year degree when it was founded in 1636, but the test was short-lived, and the four-year degree has been the standard ever since. We expect students to enter college at 18 and leave when they turn 22, and we worry about those who take a more circuitous route to graduation.

But as higher education's response to the pandemic exhibits, colleges can adapt the traditional credit-hour-based system if they want; many are doing just that in 2020-21, by minimizing breaks and compressing semesters to reduce student travel.

The Flexible Pathway model offers a variety of routes to a degree with a twist on the traditional four-year experience.

One option is for more universities to become true transfer institutions. The University of Central Florida illustrates this model. Half of UCF's 60,000 undergraduates begin their junior year through agreements with the state's community colleges. Such programs allow students to explore their academic options at less-expensive community colleges, while universities focus their efforts on upper-division courses and services, including degree completion.

Another option for the Flexible Pathway model is a low-residency approach. Many colleges have essentially adopted this approach (at least on a temporary basis) to comply with social-distancing requirements during the coronavirus. They are welcoming only freshmen and juniors, for instance, or certain majors during particular weeks of the academic year in order to reduce their numbers on campus; the remaining students are taking

classes online. But designing a track so that students spend less time on campus and more working at an internship — which might also provide a more economical path toward a degree — could be a permanent solution as well.

Look at what's happening at Southern New Hampshire University. A small cohort of incoming freshmen has been placed in the university's competency-based program — traditionally aimed at adults who complete their degree based on what they know rather than seat time — yet these freshmen are living on campus like traditional undergraduates. Then there's another group of students taking classes in the morning and working in the afternoon. Both approaches aim to cut

the price of the degree. "We can treat the academics and the coming-of-age as separate things, and in doing so, reduce the time and cost," says Southern New Hampshire's LeBlanc.

Yet another opportunity for the Flexible Pathway is for a set of institutions to connect some of their academic programs and student services. Under this scenario, universities might share courses with historically low enrollments, such as languages, or even entire academic departments in rapidly emerging fields like data analytics. Then students can easily take courses from multiple universities in the league on their way to a degree. The Big 10 Academic Alliance, which is made up of universities within the athletic conference,

3 Emerging Models for the Future of Higher Education

Model	What is it	How it adds value
Immersive Hybrid	A combination of in-person and online, both inside and outside the classroom.	Bends the cost curve by focusing residential education on in-person experiences best served face-to-face.
Flexible Pathway	A twist on the traditional 4-year experience, including a 2+2, low residency, and a networked university that might bring in outside partners, such as employers.	Meets learners where they are and what they want out of higher education: a transition experience, work, or access to wider set of academic programs.
Continual Learning	Rather than enroll and graduate, learners associate with an institution for academic programs throughout their lifetime.	Ability for workers to easily cycle in and out of an institution for upskilling and reskilling.

recently announced an online course sharing initiative to assist students taking classes remotely during the pandemic.

The benefits of institutional alliances, however, go beyond the classroom and even outside the confines of higher education. Institutions can band together to provide mental health counselors or career services to learners giving them more choices — and a more flexible pathway to the finish line.

The flexible pathway can also loop between traditional institutions and other educational providers, including employers themselves. So, for instance, a student might start out with a three-month professional certificate in data analytics offered by Google, then take some Trailhead Salesforce Courses to get a job quickly, and then decide a year later to enroll in a traditional school for additional skills in order to earn a promotion.

3. CONTINUAL LEARNING

This model reimagines higher education as a platform for continual learning where students “associate” rather than “enroll” in an institution.

With the Continual Learning model, students could move in and out of a school’s curriculum throughout their lives to gain and update their knowledge as needed. This model could replicate subscription services in the consumer world — in exchange for lower tuition up front, learners would pay regular fees during their lifetime for just-in-time access to online courses and a network of campuses for professional and personal development.

This model recognizes that a college education is no longer something that happens to young people in just one physical place. Adult learners remain an untapped base of students for most colleges and universities because they are harder to recruit and more dispersed than traditional high-school students. There are nearly 9 million adults who have earned some sort of credential short of a degree and another 25 million who went to college but never finished. Add to that the college graduates who are searching

for new skills and knowledge but don’t want to enroll in graduate programs.

The Continual Learning model is at the foundation of a plan the Georgia Institute of Technology released in 2018 that imagines a “a future not marked by arbitrary entries on a calendar, but one with numerous entry and exit points.”

Under Georgia Tech’s proposal, students would be able to learn anywhere in the world through a mix of online education and “atriums” modeled after Apple stores, with advising services and space for master classes. Meanwhile, a network of guides and coaches will help students navigate their journey through learning, no matter their point in life. “Knowledge is not static and neither should the university journey be,” says Bonnie Ferri, a vice provost at Georgia Tech, who helped lead its visioning exercise.

One theme these models share is a recognition of the need for transformational change in higher education. This change, enabled in large part by technology, would allow students to have a seamless experience no matter which pathway they choose.

The prevailing conversation about new models at colleges and universities right now is too often focused on modality — are students face-to-face, online, or hybrid? Higher education leaders need to think more broadly about elements of the models presented here and how they can provide many more and overlapping pathways for students through their institutions. Perhaps this hyperfocus right now on modality is just an incremental step to something more. The combining of the physical and the digital promises to modernize higher education and unleash new models everywhere, adding to and improving on the traditional legacy one.

SOURCE

1 Doug Toma, “Institutional Strategy: Positioning for Prestige,” in *The Organization of Higher Education*, ed. Michael N. Bastedo (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 118-120.



CHAPTER

2

Harnessing Data to Develop an Integrated Marketing Strategy



For decades, colleges and universities had a one-dimensional view of marketing: Its purpose was to promote the institution to attract students and donors. Colleges had no substantial marketing organization to speak of.

Campus leaders were so assured of the intrinsic value of higher education — and by extension, their own institutions — that they seemed to believe their colleges would market themselves.

But over the last ten years, a growing number of higher education institutions have started to take cues from other sectors of the economy in their approach to marketing as a strategic imperative for better performance and growth. In doing so, institutions adopted a view of non-profit marketing popularized by Philip Kotler, a former professor at the Kellogg

School of Management at Northwestern University. Kotler defined non-profit marketing more than 40 years ago as “carefully formulated programs” designed to “bring about voluntary and satisfying exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving institutional objectives.”

In other words, marketing is not simply messaging and promotion, but a way to build value in both reputation and revenue. Today, the most advanced marketing operations in higher education, including those at Purdue, Southern New Hampshire, Western Michigan, and Baylor universities employ data-driven appraisals

of their internal and external environment that help establish a foundation for institutional strategy.

Institutions should not take for granted that the products and messages that worked before the coronavirus will continue to be attractive and satisfying in this new world.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the economic impact left in its wake have made an analytical approach to marketing more critical than ever before. Institutions should not take for granted that the products and messages that worked before the coronavirus will continue to be attractive and satisfying in this new world.

Even the short-term response of institutions to the continuing crisis requires an authentic, timely, and integrated communication approach that goes well beyond the scope of promotion. Skilled communication leadership at the presidential level ensures that messages and tools hit the right notes, at the right time, in the right form to keep your audiences with you.

THE ELEMENTS OF MARKETING

As colleges develop a deeper understanding of the needs and experiences of current students and other key constituencies, as well as prospective students and competitors, they can put in place an approach informed by the four dimensions of marketing: products, price, place, and promotion.

Those elements of marketing are essential in distinguishing colleges and universities from their competitors and appealing to target audiences that, in turn, will motivate exchanges between institutions and students that are mutually beneficial. Deepening the

value of such exchanges over time — without trickery or spin, as well as delivering on what’s promised — allows institutions to improve on key metrics, such as higher net-tuition revenue from students, larger donations from donors, or financial support from state legislators.

This approach is often referred to as strategic integrated marketing. Today, the most innovative higher education institutions include marketers early in discussions about new products from degree offerings to advising services. Chief marketing officers increasingly have a seat in the president’s cabinet. The role marketing plays on campuses is also reflected in the steady growth in attendance at the American Marketing Association’s Symposium for the Marketing of Higher Education. With some 1,400 participants in 2019, the higher-education conference now exceeds

4 Dimensions of Marketing in Higher Ed



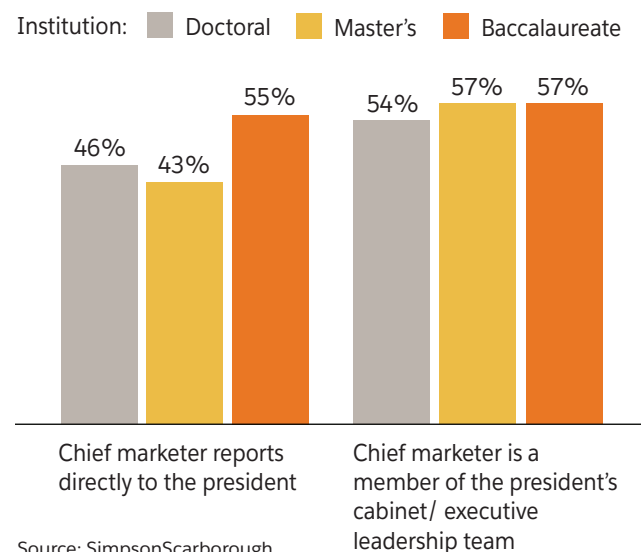


the size of AMA's meetings for marketers in every other sector.

Presidents and chancellors increasingly realize the purpose of marketing is to engage target audiences with a differentiated and compelling offer — one that motivates them to support the institution, through enrollment, philanthropy, advocacy, and funding.

Consider Simmons University's online nursing program, which adopted a pricing approach where new students defer up to half of their tuition until graduation and then payments are capped at 10 percent of their income. Or take, for example, Hartwick College in New York, which repositioned its *place* as a liberal-arts college by better defining majors that have currency in the job market and then *promoted* itself with new brand positioning: "This College. Your Journey." Or

FIGURE 1
Access to the Top



Source: SimpsonScarborough CMO Study, 2019

Indiana Tech, which developed new *products* in the Chicago area by focusing on the needs of local employers.

"We're a tuition-dependent institution," said Karl Einolf, president of Indiana Tech, where the CMO has a seat on the leadership cabinet. "We recognize that you get students by offering degrees the market wants. It used to be that our faculty developed a degree and then asked marketing to go sell it. We never thought in this integrated way."

WHY AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO MARKETING? AND WHY NOW?

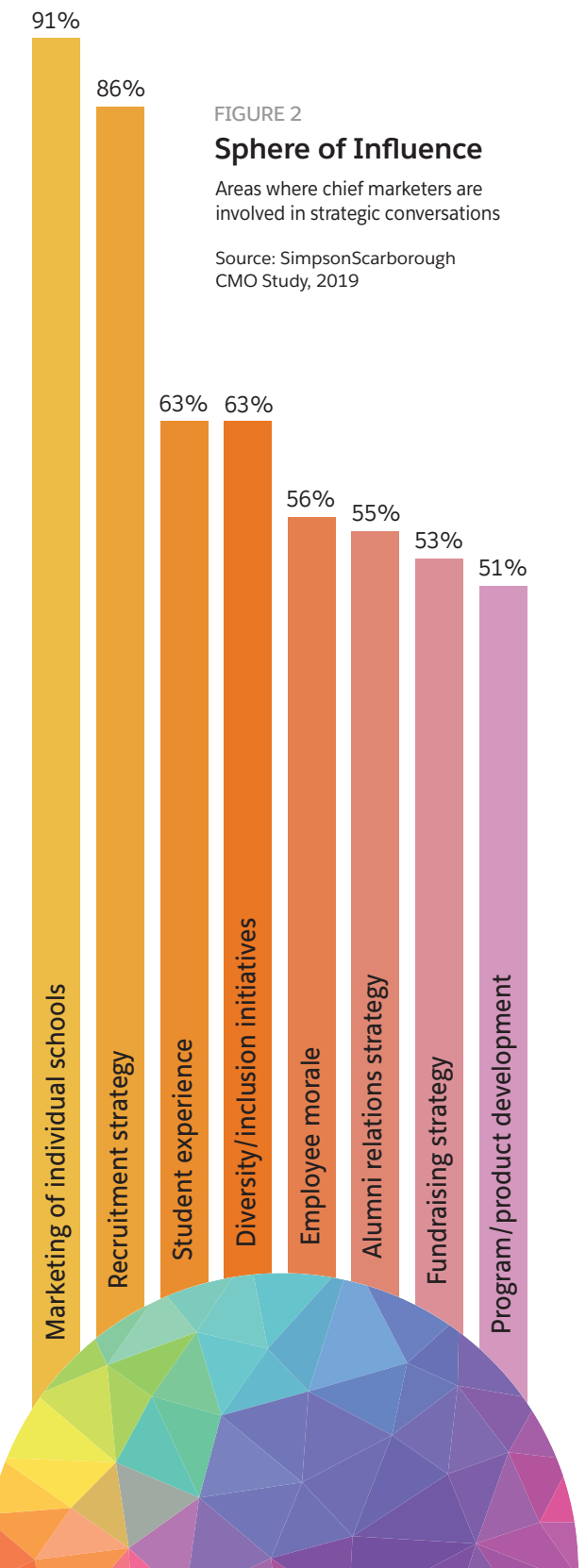
Although the influence of marketing in higher education has grown, many institutions still cling to the old promotional model. If colleges have a marketing team, it often has limited impact on strategy, and it's focused mostly on tactical measures to build the enrollment funnel, communicate with donors, and manage internal and crisis communications. While these are necessary functions downstream in the marketing process, they don't represent the full potential of marketing further upstream at the birthplace of new products.

The pressure is on colleges to innovate. Even before the coronavirus pandemic and the economic downturn in its wake, three developments were driving campuses to consider different ways of doing business.

First, presidents and governing boards are intensely aware of the need to build diverse revenue streams at a time when net-tuition is flat or declining, creating persistent financial stress.

Second, higher education is fast becoming a commodity whose value is increasingly questioned. Public trust in higher education is falling, and appreciation for the value of a degree has eroded as concerns mount about affordability and student debt.

Third, demographics are shifting, putting pressure on colleges' traditional student markets. Declining birth rates will result in a projected 15 percent drop



in college students nationally between 2025 and 2030, with some areas of the U.S. expecting a steeper decline. Even elite institutions will have to dig deeper into their applicant pool and cast wider nets to maintain their enrollment, resulting in intense competition for remaining students.

Moreover, the pipeline will include more students of color, more first-generation students, and more students who require financial assistance — all groups with different needs than the students higher education typically enrolled in the past.

Over time, the institutions that make marketing a central player in the development of programs and services are most likely to retain their students and develop deep and sustained relationships with all of their constituencies.

Although it remains unclear exactly how COVID-19 will alter these trends and the outlook for higher education in the long run, if economic history is a guide, college officials should plan on this crisis accelerating or amplifying many of these pressures.

High unemployment and falling income, for instance, will make routine tuition increases even more unsustainable and cause financial aid budgets to skyrocket. Declining endowment values and the interest income they produce cannot sustain institutional operations. Fundraising may pause or slow down. Taxpayer appropriations will be further slashed as state budgets contract.

Such pressures bring challenges, but they also present opportunities. High unemployment rates have historically resulted in higher enrollments in adult education and graduate programs. Traditional-age

students may transfer to institutions closer to home or to lower-cost community colleges. And the pandemic is leading institutions to invest in online education and learning management systems, as well as rethink their strategies around financial aid, enrollment, and mental health.

Such decisions seen through the framework of the marketing mix represent decisions on *product* (mental health and wellness programs), *place* (online and hybrid), and *price* (financial aid). Enrollment strategies involve all three, including tweaks to the traditional academic calendar that many institutions are putting in place. Taken together, there is a significant opportunity right now to develop a comprehensive integrated marketing plan and deliver a differentiated brand position among competitors that will help institutions survive and thrive in the long run.

For instance, take the University of San Diego, which announced an early return to campus this fall after the COVID-19 pandemic first emerged in order to finish the semester at Thanksgiving — a modification to the much-revered academic schedule that dozens of other schools followed. Consider Stanford University, which is allowing the equivalent of two classes of undergraduates per quarter on campus as they alternate students between face-to-face and online courses.

Institutions can identify the needs of emerging markets, enroll new students, and attract and engage other stakeholders when they anchor decisions in data. Through the sea of data collected in the enrollment funnel and everyday campus interactions — even new insight gained from virtual admissions events and remote learning in the spring of 2020 — universities can shape and deliver programs, services, and experiences that reinforce the university's brand position and offer their stakeholders satisfying exchanges of value.

Over time, the institutions that make marketing a central player in the development of programs and services are most likely to retain their students and

develop deep and sustained relationships with all of their constituencies.

FIVE APPROACHES TO INTEGRATED MARKETING

Our research suggests five key approaches institutions could follow to unleash the full power of marketing in higher education, what we're calling Elevate, Differentiate, Experience, Develop, and Measure.

1. ELEVATE

Adding the role of chief marketing officer to the president's cabinet is essential. When the role includes responsibilities across the institution — for example, developing student success efforts or estimating market demand for new programs — CMOs can cultivate relationships and networks of influence that amplify the power derived from their position on the leadership team.

...top CMOs gain influence through their contributions to campus operations beyond marketing and communication, by establishing strong relationships across campus, and by providing valued data and analytics.

When Angela Polec, assistant vice president for strategic communications and marketing at La Salle University, explored the nature of the responsibilities of CMOs in a case study of four private institutions, she found that no matter their formal responsibilities, the chief marketers were instrumental in two or more areas of the marketing mix across campus. Successful CMOs employ a combination of formal and informal power to effect change. In addition to their seat at the executive table and support from the president, top CMOs gain influence through their contributions

to campus operations beyond marketing and communication, by establishing strong relationships across campus, and by providing valued data and analytics.

2. DIFFERENTIATE

An institution's data are the building blocks of its unique value proposition in higher education. What makes students choose your institution? What are the attributes of students who are most engaged on campus or who outperform their peers academically? What about those students who go on to graduate and become satisfied alumni?

By harnessing this data, colleges and universities can use it to inform or refine their brand and identify a position in the marketplace that is authentic to internal stakeholders, relevant to students and supporters, and uncommon among competitors.

Without a clear understanding of their students, institutions often fail to think beyond the core populations they are already enrolling or assume the academic programs and student services they're offering are suitable.

When Saint Louis University analyzed several years of its graduating classes to find students who finished on time with high satisfaction scores, officials found that almost half were Catholic, with a significant majority majoring in health care, business, and STEM (science, technology, engineering and math).

Using that data, the university built personas of potential students it wanted and then matched up those qualities to high school students in markets where they didn't recruit heavily. They added recruiters that targeted specific high schools, and the university invited counselors from those schools to "fly-ins" to visit campus. In the years after the university put its enrollment plan in place, the peer group of institutions it competes with for students shifted from nearby institutions to regional and national universities, and it reduced its reliance on in-state students.

3. EXPERIENCE

Faculty and professional staff may become so wrapped up in their programs and disciplines that they tend to overlook the other elements necessary to make delivery of the experience successful for students, alumni, employees, donors, and other supporters.

Today, the consumer economy is all about the experience — it's just in time, it's personalized, and informed by seamless and valuable data. How we feel about a product, our emotional bond, is the byproduct of a satisfying experience. Think Southwest flight attendants. Starbucks coffee. The Apple Store.

Colleges and universities also need to develop brands, which are the sum total of all experiences, and exist in the minds of your stakeholders. Campuses have long emphasized critical moments in the student experience — orientation, first-year courses, sophomore retention, graduation — and that narrow

Although most campuses have been gathering massive amounts of data about their students, they still have a long way to go to develop the interactions that will give them a competitive edge.

focus can create a distorted picture. It also diverts attention away from the bigger picture: the student journey.

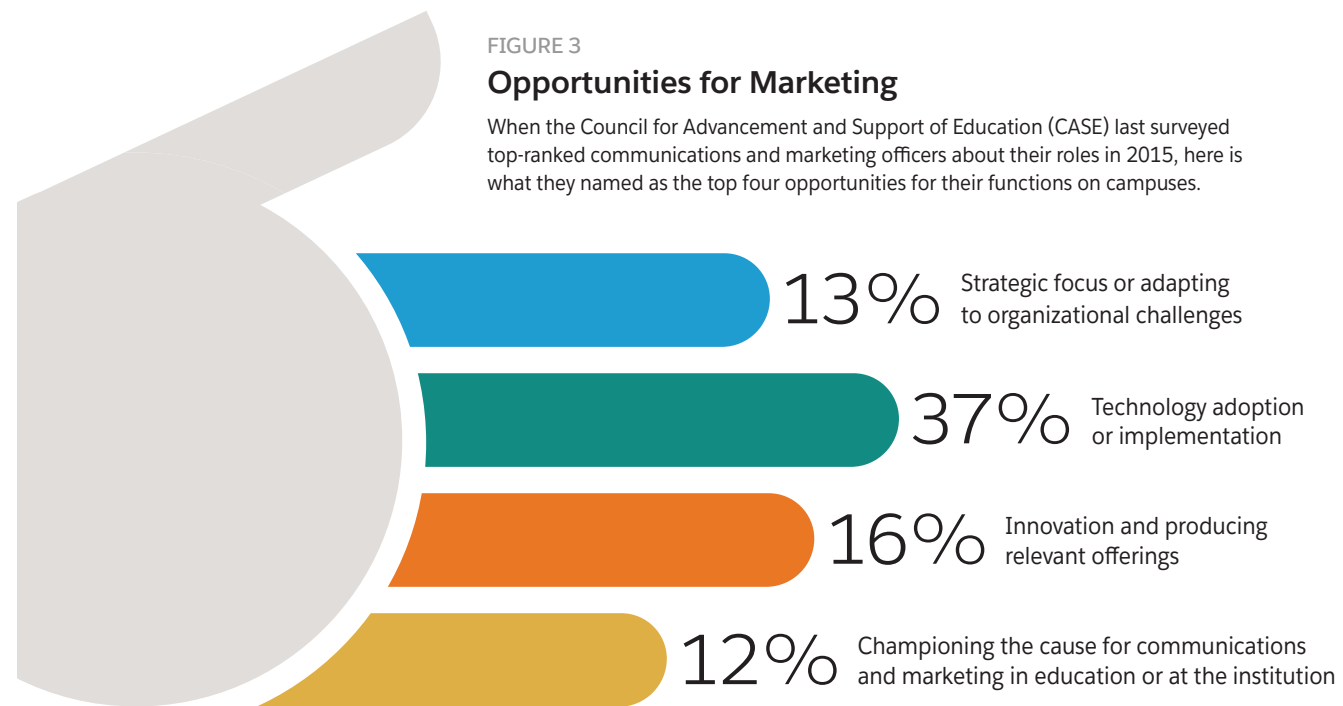
Big data and analytics are the keys to unlocking insights to improve the overall student experience. Although most campuses have been gathering massive amounts of data about their students, they still have a long way to go to develop the interactions that will give them a competitive edge.



FIGURE 3

Opportunities for Marketing

When the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) last surveyed top-ranked communications and marketing officers about their roles in 2015, here is what they named as the top four opportunities for their functions on campuses.



Source: 2015 CASE Educational Communications and Marketing Trends Survey

Western Michigan University recently completed a 20-month planning process that invited the entire campus community to contribute to an open and collaborative design process. By harnessing data on students and graduates, university officials found the university's undergraduates thrived in a liberal-arts education program but within the setting of a large public university.

"We didn't start with the marketing campaign," said Tony Proudfoot, the university's vice president for marketing and strategic communication. "So many universities think they know who they are and who they appeal to until they dig into the data and ask their stakeholders. When we did that, we discovered higher ed wasn't working for all of our students."

4. DEVELOP

Prospective students often bypass official marketing channels these days. They scroll through topic pages on Reddit without ever reading an email from a school or visiting its campus. They watch YouTube videos recorded by students talking about how they applied to college and showing what life is really like on their campuses.

In this uncertain world with tight budgets, university marketers need to know they are making decisions that are anchored in data. While students and parents still click on Google results and scroll through Instagram pages, they also email, call, and increasingly text and chat with colleges and universities.

At the same time, marketers put content on third party channels and in the hands of engaged influencers, who share content. This is part of a mix of owned (college web site), earned (an article in the media that endorses the institution), and paid (ads or boosted social media posts) media. These elements work together in digital marketing, to raise the institution's profile in search, elevate brand awareness, and then encourage calls to action that develop and deepen the relationship and create value.

Effective use of marketing analytics comes from linking customer relationship systems, which track relationships with stakeholders, with content management systems, allowing colleges to both capture and influence the moments in a student's pathway to choosing a college or a donor's journey in making a gift.

5. MEASURE

As with any strategy designed to build value, upfront investment in marketing is required. This investment should be carefully tracked, and CMOs should be held accountable for evaluating outcomes and estimating the return on investment provided in terms of reputation and revenue.

Historically, measurements in higher education marketing have been hard to come by, in part because marketing and resources associated with it are often distributed across the institution, and may not be entirely controlled or influenced by the CMO. In addition, comparative measures of marketing performance have not been developed because there is no standard organizational structure from which reasonable comparisons might be derived.

University presidents and CMOs should develop short — and long-term measures that are aligned with the goals their marketing investments are designed to achieve. If a new brand strategy is designed primarily to drive better enrollment outcomes, for instance, then short-term measures might focus on changes in inquiries, applications, visits, enrollment yield, and the percentage of students for whom the institution is their first choice. Growth in net tuition revenue might reflect a stronger brand, as would stronger retention rates.

Such metrics are imperfect proxies and reflect changes in admissions tactics or financial aid practices, but they also reflect an underlying change in perceptions of the institution. In addition, those perceptions should be periodically measured through surveys of stakeholders to establish a baseline and track changes over time.

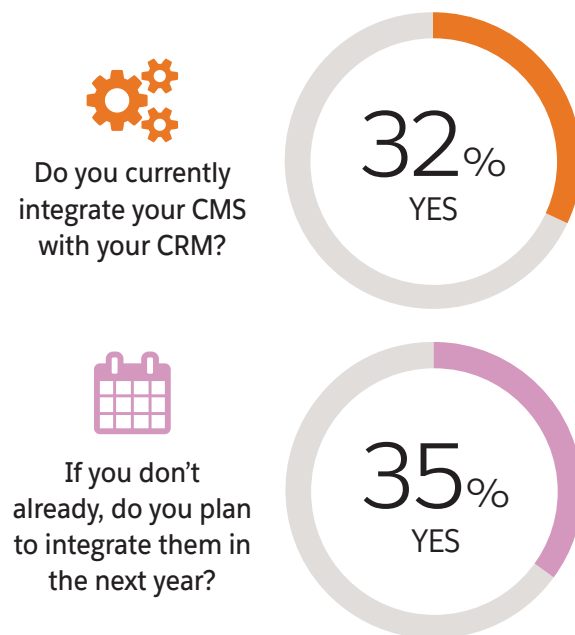
A developing area of higher education marketing measurement is return on investment (ROI). Marketing strategies that provide the highest return for the lowest investment should be targeted for additional implementation, while others are reduced or retired. ROI measures can also take another form — tallying the lifetime value of a student or donor, for example, or measuring the change in outcomes relative to the added investment in plans designed to affect those outcomes. All of these ROI measures help leaders focus their investments on the policies and tactics that are yielding the greatest returns.

As higher education increasingly embraces innovations, such as electronic advising, micro-degrees, and online programs, institutions need the right marketing expertise to generate the depth and breadth of engagement they seek. In the years ahead, as campuses pursue opportunities to survive and thrive, the bigger the innovation, the greater the risk of failure. An integrated marketing approach can help institutions reduce those risks.

FIGURE 4

An Integrated Approach to Content and Relationships

The technology behind a campus' approach to marketing has largely been developed on separate tracks with a content management system (CMS) and a customer relationship management system (CRM) that often don't talk to each other.



Source: SimpsonScarborough CMO Study, 2019



CHAPTER 3

Recruiting and Engaging Generation Z



While colleges compete with each other by emphasizing their differences, there is often uniformity in how they recruit students.

Colleges and universities have common sets of deadlines, similar marketing strategies to fill their admissions funnels, and even comparable methods in how they evaluate applicants using test scores and grades.

For enrollment leaders, there has always been comfort in the cadence of the annual admissions calendar. But in the spring of 2020, this system was upended by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Within weeks, colleges and universities across the United States, and much of the world, shuttered their campuses. For admissions offices, the timing could not have been worse. At the undergraduate level, April is the busiest month for campus visits — about a quarter of all teenagers and their families who visit a campus

do so during that one month. At the graduate level, spring is a critical time for inquiries as prospective students start to think about their fall plans.

Admissions offices quickly pivoted and shifted most of their activities online. Zoom webinars replaced in-person information sessions. Virtual tours, often a neglected part of the admissions website, were moved to a prominent spot on the home page. Social media became a critical lifeline to prospects as campus tour guides walked around campus rolling video on their phones and posting the clips to YouTube and Instagram.

Forced to experiment on the fly and ditch strategies that they had employed every spring to yield a class, institutions sweated hitting their numbers even as they

discovered fresh approaches to how they do business. And national statistics show that at least for the time being enrollment is remaining steady (see Figure 1).

“In some ways, the spring experience evened the playing field because no one had a playbook for a pandemic,” said Andrew Palumbo, dean of admissions and financial aid at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. “Were we worried? Sure. But it was also the kind of disruption that we probably needed in order to innovate.”

The pandemic is shaking up higher education, especially how students and their families first experience higher education — through the admissions office. Which parts of the recruitment process we hold on to and which parts we toss aside is so far unclear and won’t come into focus for quite some time. But one thing is for sure: College admissions will likely never be the same after the pandemic.

In many ways, COVID-19 brought to the forefront a shift in how students discovered campuses, one that had been occurring for years but that college leaders were slow to react to. Prospective students were already circumventing the college-branded recruiting channels that institutions had long regulated: direct mail, email, and high school visits. Now, particularly in the middle of a pandemic while stuck at home, students were also learning about campuses through sources that felt more authentic to them than a college website or a well-practiced in-person tour.

Students browsed through Reddit forums and scrolled through social media feeds of other teenagers instead of reading lengthy emails from colleges. Discouraged from visiting campuses, they watched YouTube videos from current undergraduates talking about how they applied to college or showing what life was like on their campuses.

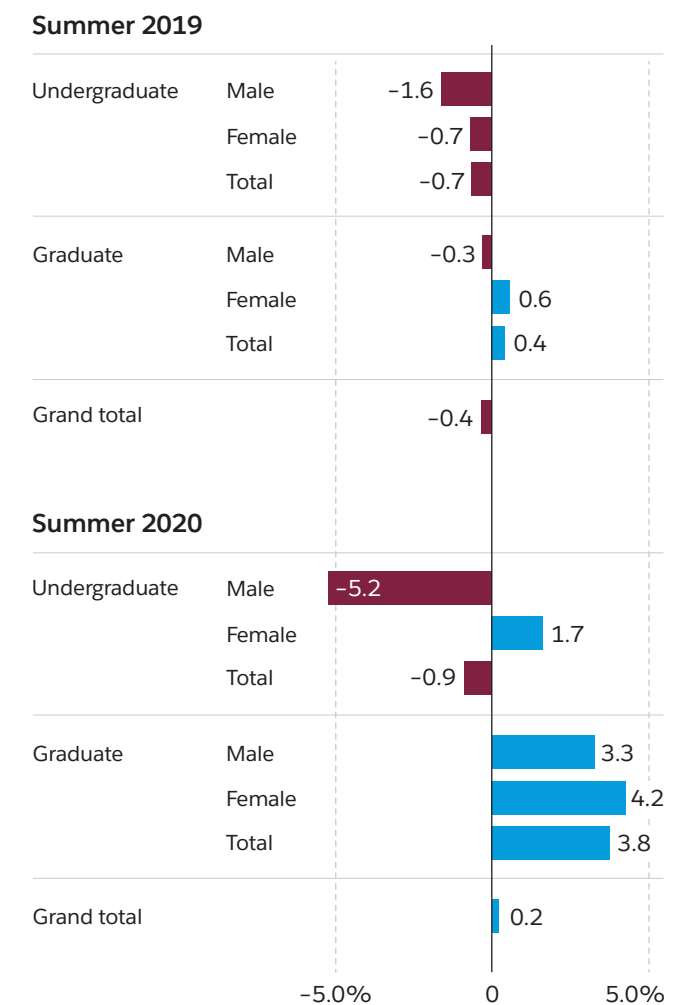
One of those students, Katherine Waissbluth, a Stanford undergraduate who has more than 69,000 subscribers to her YouTube channel, The Kath Path,

told me she heard from prospective students who liked seeing “actual students” and what it was like to be inside a class or a dorm room. “To Gen Z, too many things produced by colleges seem overly produced, not authentic,” Waissbluth said. “It’s important to them to know what a campus is really like especially if they can’t get there.”

FIGURE 1
**Early Indicator:
Enrollments Remaining Steady**

While summer enrollments were down among men, because women account for nearly 60 percent of students in higher education, overall enrollment was flat compared to pre-pandemic 2019.

Percentage change from previous year



Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center

Suddenly, in the midst of a global pandemic, recruitment approaches designed for millennials began to show their age with a new cohort, Generation Z. Born starting around 1995, this generation is making its way through campuses just as demographics overall are changing for higher education, with a steep dropoff in the number of students graduating from high school starting around 2026.

Gen Z is different from millennials in a key way: They are the first generation raised on digital devices that are mobile and always present in their lives. So, they are used to finding what they need when they need it.

Gen Z is different from millennials in a key way: They are the first generation raised on digital devices that are mobile and always present in their lives. So, they are used to finding what they need when they need it. And because of the rise of data analytics and algorithms during their lifetimes, they are accustomed to having things constantly recommended to them and delivered quickly.

As a result, colleges need to rethink how to better connect with prospective students early on and keep them engaged through the recruitment and enrollment process much like Instagram, TikTok, Amazon, or Netflix does. While enrollment management offices have historically invested in data gathering and analysis, they have also resisted making too many changes all at once. Their fear was that in a sea of reforms they wouldn't be able to tease out the approaches that genuinely worked.

Now the adjustments brought on by COVID-19 mean that looking at past performance won't necessarily provide the indicators that colleges have come to rely on to make decisions. "We're flying blind right now," said MaryFrances McCourt, vice president for finance

and treasurer at the University of Pennsylvania. "It's clear that the pandemic is changing student behavior. Will it be for the long term? Who knows, but we better be tracking it, constantly modeling it, so we know where to make the right investments, and when to make them."

The most advanced enrollment management operations had already established data warehouses and were early adopters of customer relationship management systems (CRMs). Thus, many campuses have the critical pieces in place to emerge from the pandemic ready to recruit and engage the next generation of students through personalized, on-demand services. At Ohio State University, prospective students can opt in to tours of individual colleges on certain days and also get a closer glimpse through an app. Similarly at Babson University, an admissions portal consolidates all the information that potential students need in one place and then displays personalized information to students at different points in the application process.

Now institutions need to take their engagement strategies to the next level by deploying those technology tools earlier and more often in the recruitment process. "The world is changing, students are changing," said Palumbo of Worcester Polytechnic Institute, "and enrollment management needs to change, too. Our problem is that we rarely peer far enough in the future because we're so focused on bringing in the next class."

The more connected a university's recruitment and admissions strategy is both over a course of a year and between cycles, the more positive the feedback effects are in using data to customize offerings and foresee future opportunities — and risks.

HOW COVID IS CHANGING ADMISSIONS

The pandemic is accelerating three key trends in recruitment and admissions that will require colleges to adopt more targeted approaches, more often and earlier on in the recruitment funnel.



The first is the rise of optional admissions testing. More than a million high school students who wanted to take the SAT or ACT for the first time haven't been able to because of canceled testing dates and closed testing centers. In response, hundreds of colleges have made test scores an optional piece of the application for at least a year. Once their world doesn't come crashing down and they still recruit a class, those colleges are unlikely to flock back to the test. The SAT and ACT aren't likely to disappear completely, but they might be knocked off the pedestal that American teenagers and their families have put them on.

Here's why that's important. The SAT and ACT not only provided admissions officers with a key piece of data on student performance, the tests also delivered something nearly as valuable to schools that look at a multitude of academic factors anyway: a lead. Every year, colleges and universities buy tens of millions of names of teenagers from the SAT and ACT. The so-called student search business is bigger than ever for

both testing agencies. With the SAT, a student's name is sold, on average, 18 times over her high school career, and some names have been purchased more than 70 times.

In the pre-Internet days, the SAT and ACT released names twice a year; now they offer new names a dozen or more times, turning the pursuit of students into a year-round effort. Years ago, the fall of junior year was early enough for most colleges to start their outreach. But for competitive reasons, schools now want to scope out students even sooner. As a result, schools have stepped up recruitment of high school sophomores. Today, 9 out of every 10 colleges purchase names of sophomores.

Without those leads to fill the top of their recruitment funnel, colleges will struggle to attract enough applications to send enough admits to get enough Yeses from seniors to fill their dorm beds and classroom seats. They will need to turn to other

methods to search and find students.

The second change requiring a more connected student recruitment and admissions experience is that the traditional college search for teenagers has been altered perhaps permanently. In the past, no matter how much colleges spent on direct marketing to teenagers, a student's college list was often based on a variety of factors, many of which were out of the control of institutions.

Applicants find the right “fit” by weighing one institution's qualities — academic, social, and financial — against another's. To spend any time in a typical high school is to see how college lists are shaped by peers and perception. For many students, their college search is a list of ten campuses that everyone else is applying to, or only small liberal-arts colleges, or only institutions out-of-state. It's like the GPS app, Waze, when there's an accident ahead and everyone is

directed on to the same street. Teenagers are directed to the same colleges and universities over and over again because of the rankings, college search tools, or other influences in their lives.

In the pandemic, however, students lost that old GPS device that put them all on the same path. There are no college tours, no visits to high schools by college representatives, no college fairs, and fewer brochures and emails will be sent to students whose name isn't on file with the ACT or SAT. Think about it — many prospective students in their familiar high school hallways aren't hearing the cacophony of college brands from their classmates and counselors.

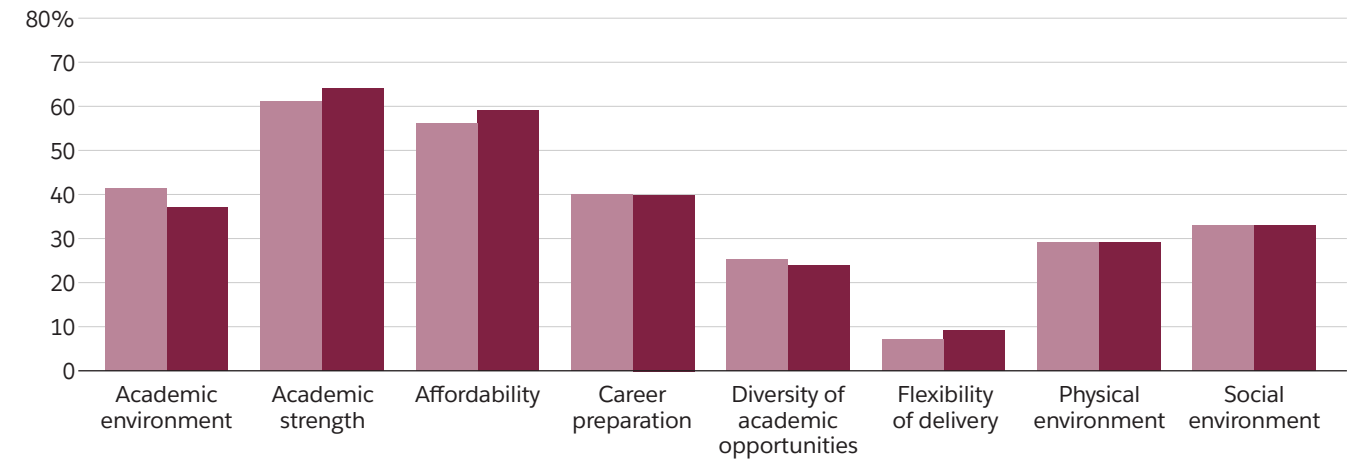
Instead, they're “Zooming” in to dozens of college information sessions in the course of a few days and visiting campuses virtually, not just those on the spring break college tour. In doing so, they might actually look at a course catalog to see if a school is the right



FIGURE 2

Why Students Enroll Where They Do

2019 2020



Source: Eduventures Survey of Admitted Students in 2019 and in 2020

academic fit or connect with a professor.

The third development of the pandemic that will require colleges to think differently about the recruitment process is the admissions application itself. In the pre-pandemic world, colleges just kept asking for more from applicants — more activities, a more rigorous high-school curriculum — all under the guise of holistic admission.

But with many of the traditions of high school postponed, cancelled, or changed, it's difficult in the short term for students to fill in 10 spaces for extra-curricular activities or flag down teachers for recommendations. As they assess students in the coming years, admissions officers will be forced to shift their focus on what matters. To do that they will need to analyze the data on their recent graduates to find those who were most engaged and satisfied and who finished on time and then reverse engineer their path to college to figure out why.

It's already clear from the early data on why students enrolled where they did during the pandemic that value is top of mind (see Figure 2). In a recession, families will seek out institutions that provide the best

return on investment. It's critical that colleges know who those students are in the recruitment funnel to ultimately drive their yield and enrollment strategies.

THREE STRATEGIES FOR THE CONNECTED RECRUITMENT EXPERIENCE

My research over two years in writing a book on recruitment and admissions and in interviews with enrollment leaders during the pandemic points to three strategies for building a more connected pathway within an institution that I'm calling *Discover*, *Personalize*, and *Engage*. Let's explore what each strategy entails.

DISCOVER

Gen Z students don't wait for official information from colleges anymore. Instead they browse, click, and chat their way to an opinion of a campus without ever reading an email or meeting with an admissions counselor. Then they often submit an application to colleges they haven't previously contacted at all. For enrollment leaders, the less they know about their applicants the more difficult it is to determine who will apply and who might enroll.

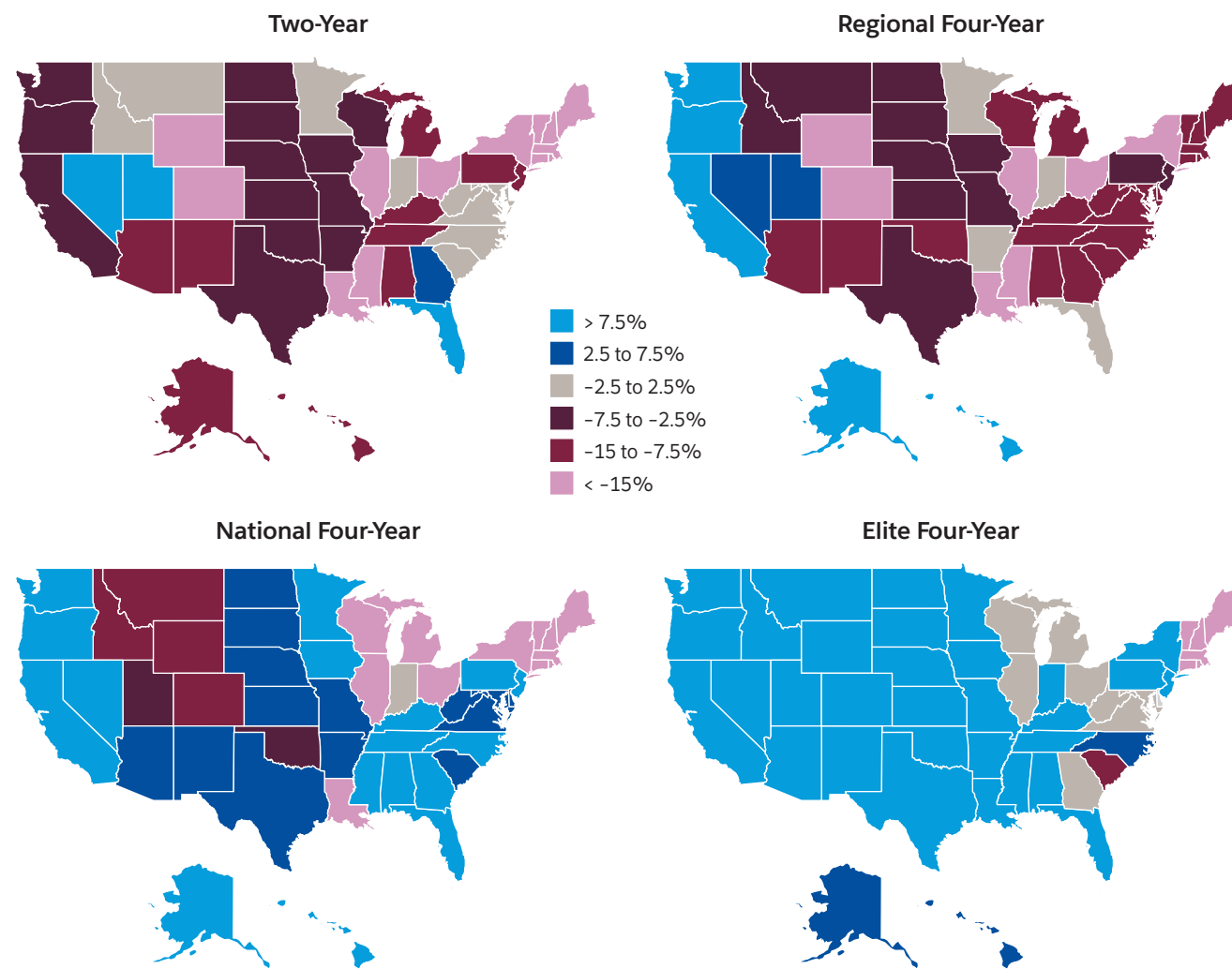
In enrollment management offices one of the key indicators of success is yield, the percentage of admitted students who send deposits to a particular college. Yield tells admissions deans whether they have admitted the right number of applicants to meet their enrollment goals. Falling short costs colleges significant dollars. In recent years, many traditional yield models had been invalidated by a sea change in

student college-choice behavior. Given demographic trends, the divide in admissions in which institutions yield their students or those that don't will only grow wider in the decade ahead (see Figure 3).

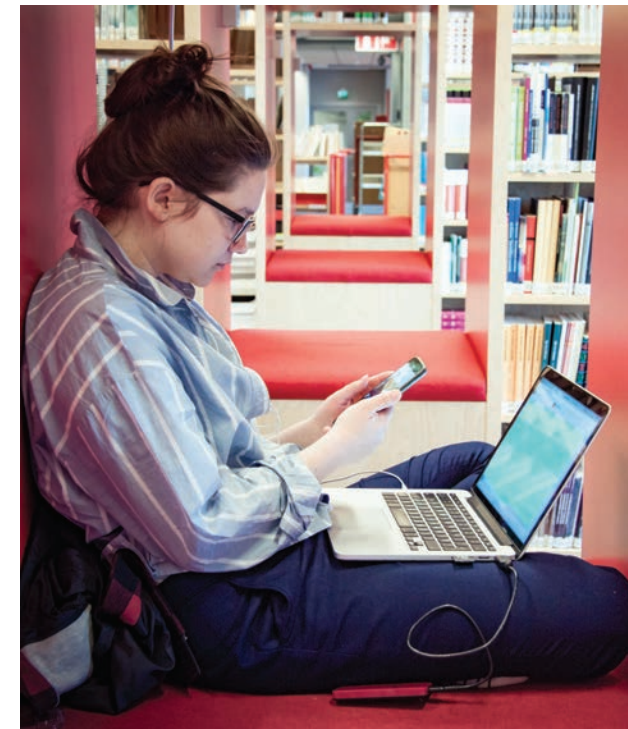
Under the Discover scenario, instead of colleges controlling when to interact with prospective students, institutions join students on an exploration for the

FIGURE 3
A Growing Divide

Demographic data on higher education is useful, but it's also worth looking at demand by region and institutional type. That's exactly what economist Nathan Grawe has done in an update to his book on demographics, which paints a different picture for top-ranked institutions from their counterparts.



Source: *The Agile College*, Nathan D. Grawe, 2020



quickly or their order from Amazon to arrive the next day, they want colleges to answer their questions in the moment. This is why institutions such as Georgia State, George Washington University, Arizona State, and the University of Memphis use chatbots to provide automated responses to common questions at any time of the day or night. In doing so, the universities are collecting yet more data to help them discover students' desires and ultimately personalize their experiences.

PERSONALIZE

Before the pandemic, campus information sessions were intentionally designed to be broad and generic because colleges wanted to attract as many prospective students as possible. Virtual programs, however, can be targeted to specific student interests because they potentially draw from a larger set of prospects who can connect from anywhere and aren't limited by geography or ability to travel.

right fit. This requires institutions to gather more data than ever before, not just on who students are, but what they are doing, especially online. Just as Netflix knows what television shows to show them based on their viewing habits, teenagers now expect colleges to provide a similar personalization.

When students visit the University of Toledo's website, the institution is constantly trying to gather some tidbit of information. A name and email address are enough at first. Then a pop-up at another time will collect information on intended major or year in school. Once Toledo has a name, it can start to discover what the student is interested in by tracking their visits to the website, by seeing whether they liked any of the university's Facebook pages, or opened an email from the music department. In a time of constrained resources, these actions can help institutions decide where to recruit and how, whom to admit, and how much financial aid to offer in order to yield the class they want.

Speed is critical in the Discover scenario. Just as teenagers want their Uber and Lyft cars to arrive

Online sessions appeal to students who want personalized attention, and they're unlikely to go away even when travel to campus resumes. During the pandemic, the University of Arizona, for instance, has offered information sessions to students interested in specific majors, certain clubs, or jobs on campus.

Going forward, digital technologies will track those students through the recruitment funnel and continue to offer them additional information on their interests. It will also offer data on what clubs to expand or services to scale in the future, said Kasey Urquidez, Arizona's vice president for enrollment management, and can provide ideas for new academic programs and credentials down the road. Such a model can help universities transform themselves and build new revenue streams based on what students actually want rather than on what campus leaders think they want.

The level of personalization can even extend to the application itself. One feature of the application from Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success, is a virtual "locker." It allows students as early as ninth grade to upload their written work, videos, photos, and

The post-pandemic future demands new models for higher education. The more data colleges are collecting at the point of first contact with prospective students, the more they are able in the future to meet more-fundamental student needs and desires.

other materials that show off their potential beyond a transcript. At first, the locker is accessed only by students, but over time they can open it up to their parents, counselors, and most important, to colleges through the admissions process. Such a tool imagines a future where instead of waiting for applications to arrive each year, colleges could conduct searches of data that students and parents choose to make available, allowing institutions to become engaged with prospective students during high school and into higher education.

ENGAGE

As mentioned earlier, the tactics colleges have used to recruit students and then evaluate them for admissions have remained fairly consistent from college to college and year to year. An annual survey of admissions officers by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) has found remarkable similarity across all types of institutions in the measures they employ to admit students.

But as some factors, such as test scores and interviews, decline because of the pandemic, colleges will need to look for new measures of a student's engagement and ability to succeed on campus. Already, some colleges are allowing applicants to personalize their application and engage in new ways. Consider Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in Indiana, which has added a 28-question section to its application that reveals how much power students think they have over their own destinies.

Elsewhere, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology gives applicants the option of submitting a Maker Portfolio to show their "technical creativity." Applicants can send images, a short video and a PDF that shed light on a project they've undertaken. The institution also asks students to explain what the project meant to them. Similarly, at Goucher College in Maryland, applicants can send in two-minute videos and two pieces of work from their high-school years instead of test scores, transcripts, and recommendations.

Keeping prospective students engaged through the application process and beyond is more important than ever given new rules approved by NACAC in 2019 that open the floodgates to potentially even more aggressive recruiting from colleges. For years, NACAC held to an ethics code that banned schools from offering incentives to encourage students to apply early decision or from continuing to recruit applicants after the May 1 decision deadline. But following an investigation by the Justice Department, NACAC was forced to scrap the rules. Now colleges can offer incentives like extra financial aid for binding early-decision applicants, aggressively pursue new undergraduates who already committed to other institutions, and even recruit as transfer students applicants who were admitted but chose to enroll elsewhere.

The post-pandemic future demands new models for higher education. The more data colleges are collecting at the point of first contact with prospective students, the more they are able in the future to meet more-fundamental student needs and desires. An institution might find out that students want the traditional campus experience, but one that allows more flexibility so they can intern in another city during the semester. Another college might discover that students are not just interested in, say a major they offer, like data science, but that they also want to learn skills to visualize data and tell stories. That knowledge offers opportunities for colleges and universities to create an even wider range of programs and services and to develop trusted relationships with learners for the rest of their life.



CHAPTER 4

The Key Role of Faculty in Designing the Student-Centered University



It was a well-known adage frequently attributed to a stern professor in first-year college lectures: *Look to your right, look to your left. One of you won't be here by the end of the year.*

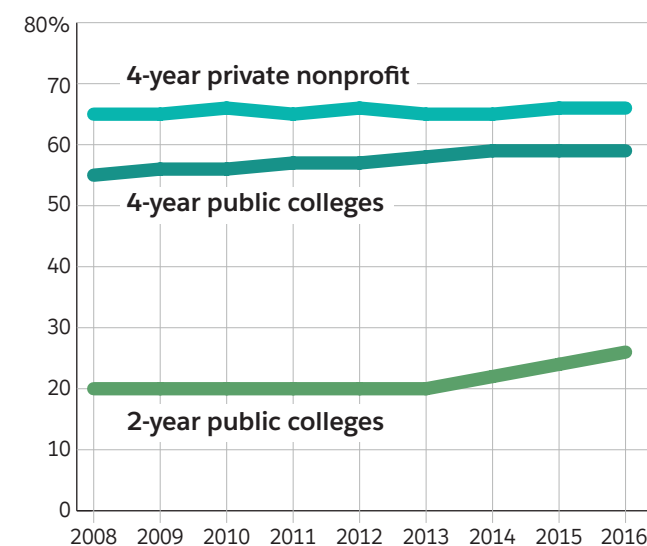
Statements like that, made famous by the movie *The Paper Chase*, were for years the material of campus lore. But they — and the attitudes behind them — began to go out of style in the 1970s, when concerns about student retention and graduation rates led education researchers to develop models of student retention built on “student integration,” or what we now commonly call student engagement.¹

In the last forty years, a groundswell of research on why students succeed in college has led to a remarkable change in how we think about retention. It's no longer about the student and his or her shortcomings; it's about the institution and its failure

to create a clear pathway to graduation. The increasing emphasis on “student success” has ushered in far-ranging campus innovations, such as the first-year experience, professional advisors, adaptive learning, and data analytics, all in the name of making universities more student-centered.

Decades of this work are finally beginning to pay off. While completion rates in higher education remain stubbornly low, they are no longer in decline — and indeed have risen slightly in the last decade (see *Figure 1*). Moving the numbers even that far was a difficult task on campuses, both culturally and financially. And it took a really long time.

FIGURE 1
Graduation Rates on the Rise



Note: Students who earned credential in 150% of expected time.
Source: U.S. Education Department

Given the demographic and fiscal forces bearing down on higher education right now, it is imperative that institutions continue to make student success as much of a priority on their campuses as access to a college education is. Doing that will require a change in strategy, one that engages faculty like never before and builds on the existing efforts of staff members and new technology.

TECHNOLOGY + FACULTY + STAFF = STUDENT SUCCESS

In recent years, the student success movement has emphasized the use of technology — and for good reason. The rapid rise of computing power and cloud-based software has allowed colleges to harness the massive amounts of data they collect on students. It also helped connect the dots on the activities of students across campus, sometimes in real time.

Technology is seen by campus leaders as the answer to quickly improving retention and graduation rates because it provides both the scale and swiftness that colleges need to achieve their desired outcomes.

But technology and data are not solutions in and of themselves. Tech investments have helped substantially on many campuses because initial barriers to student success were administrative in nature. Better systems and processes brought on by technology reduced bureaucracy and thus improved outcomes for students.

Now taking student success efforts to the next level will require solutions closer to the center of the academic enterprise. As such, they demand the involvement of faculty members and in parallel with technology and staff members in order to reach ever-higher attainment goals (see *case study on University of Maryland at College Park, page 54*).

“Technology tends to grab the headlines,” said Tim Renick, Georgia State University’s senior vice president for student success. “What’s less apparent to outsiders is that technology gives information to faculty who then use it to redesign programs and classes. We need both.”

Faculty are essential to student success efforts, yet on too many campuses they remain on the sidelines of the endeavors. Reforms related to curricular requirements, academic policies, advising practices, and transfer guidelines all rely on the willingness of faculty to design new approaches and carry them out.

“We should see faculty as thought partners, not spectators,” said Bridget Burns, the executive director of the University Innovation Alliance, a group of eleven public universities committed to increasing graduation rates of low-income students. “It’s the faculty who are the ones on the front lines.”

Even though the value of faculty-student interaction has been apparent for decades, colleges and universities continue to struggle with the exact strategies to encourage professors to better mentor undergraduates. This brief attempts to inform those evolving conversations. It is focused on *why* the faculty role in student success is more critical than ever before and *how* colleges can better connect faculty



Critical Pillars of Student Success

Staff

More than three decades of academic research studies have found a critical link between out-of-the-classroom experiences with staff members and student success. From academic advisors and librarians to departmental secretaries and custodians, non-faculty staff create an environment conducive to student learning and personal development.

Technology

As the volume of available data on students swells, analyzing the information to improve decision making has become central to efforts of colleges to improve retention and graduation rates. Technology is a critical tool that complements the human element inside and outside the classroom allowing faculty and staff to identify warning signs and develop interventions.

Faculty

Faculty are the essential third pillar of student success efforts. Reforms related to curricular requirements, academic policies, advising practices, and transfer guidelines all rely on the willingness of faculty to design new approaches and carry them out.

Source: Author research; Kuh, G., D. Schuh, J.H. Whitt, E.J. Associates (1991). *Involving Colleges: Encouraging Student Learning and Personal Development Through Out-of-Class Experiences*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco

to students even as they continue to build and invest in technology and staff to improve retention and graduation rates.

Indeed, the best strategy for student success in the future is an institution-wide platform built across three pillars: faculty, staff, and technology. Higher education remains too siloed in its approach to serving students. While students move seamlessly across campuses, their services are often provided by departments or schools that don't always talk with each other or even

share common student information systems.

Faculty and staff, said Sukhwant Jhaj, "need to see the institution through the eyes of students" to better understand their needs. Jhaj led a redesign of undergraduate advising and degree pathways when he was a vice provost at Portland State University. He did so by employing a user-centered design process. Seeing the university through that student lens allows leaders to better understand why the three pillars are necessary for the next wave of student success.

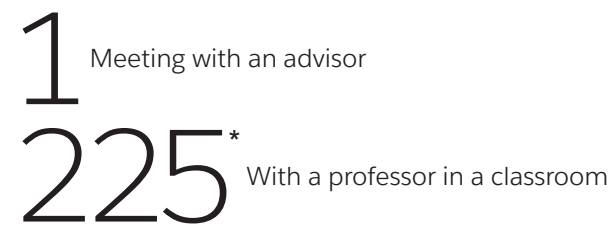
FACULTY AS MENTORS

When one thinks of college, a classic image probably emerges: tree-shaded quads, ivy-covered neo-Gothic buildings, and of course, people — from undergraduates to professors. Despite the billions spent on buildings, technology, and administration in higher education, it's the face-to-face interactions that students have with their peers and faculty members over the life of their college career that they'll likely talk about years after they graduate.

FIGURE 2

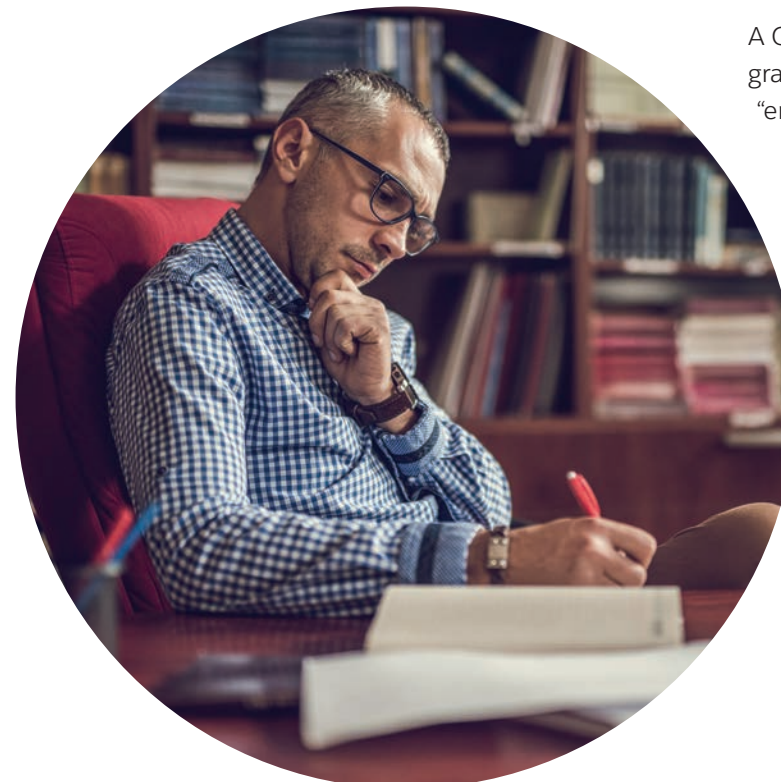
Where Students Meet Faculty

Average number of hours a first-semester student spends



*Assuming a schedule of 15 credits

Source: NACADA Journal, Volume 37, 2017



More than a decade ago, an influential study with a fitting title, "Faculty Do Matter," detailed the faculty behaviors and attitudes that impact student success. It concluded that professors have "a dramatic effect on student learning and engagement," and perhaps play the "single-most important role in student learning."²

Dozens of studies since then have duplicated that finding. Mentors in college have been tied to student success and even a graduate's well-being after college. And while anyone on a campus can mentor a student — coaches, friends, staff members — it's faculty who are mostly likely to fill the role, given the amount of interaction they have with students, particularly in their first year of college (see Figure 2).

"Faculty can either be the gateway to a student getting excited about learning and understanding college, or they can shut someone down," said Dan Chambliss, author of *How College Works* (Harvard University Press, 2014). The book's key finding, based on a decade's worth of research, is that mentorships are the "most valuable" of relationships in the totality of the student experience in college.

A Gallup survey of more than 70,000 college graduates found that those who had a mentor who "encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams" were *twice* as likely as others to be engaged at work and thriving on the Gallup-Purdue Index of well-being (that is, being happy, comfortable, and satisfied).³ Brandon Busteded, who headed up the survey work for Gallup, said nothing else in the study scored as high in terms of well-being. But, he noted, less than a quarter of college graduates in the survey had a mentor in college. Given that, he said, "there is a tremendous opportunity for colleges to rethink how the analog, face-to-face experience of faculty and students should augment the increasing digital interactions they are having."

BRACING FOR A DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFT

The generation in the pipeline to college is the most diverse in modern American history, bringing students into higher education that the system may have provided access to but not necessarily graduated in the past.

The number of white students is projected to decline by some 14 percent by 2030, and be mostly offset by an increase in minority students, particularly Hispanic students, according to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.⁴ Between 2024 and 2028, minority high-school graduates are expected to number about 1.5 million annually, 12 percent higher than in 2013, with Hispanic graduates projected to increase by more than 50 percent by 2025.

The students graduating from high school in the coming decade — Hispanics, low-income, and those first in their family to go to college — will be segments of the population who historically have been underserved. Low-income students, for instance, are less likely to enroll in college, and also less apt to graduate. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, some 69 percent of students from higher-income high schools enroll

Faculty-Student Interaction: The leading principle for student success

In 1987, Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson published the “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,” in the *American Association of Higher Education Bulletin*. The article became a seminal piece in the annals of higher-education research. The first principle the two scholars outlined was the importance of Student-Faculty contact. Here’s what the pair wrote:

Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students’ intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans.

immediately in college compared to just 54 percent of students from low-income high schools (see Figure 3).

These demographic changes require not only sustained attention to the issue of student success,

but also new approaches to engage faculty in this important issue. Faculty were among the leaders of higher-education access movement in the late 1960s, pushing institutions to broaden opportunities for women and minority students at the time. Now as the national conversation shifts from access to social and racial equality in postsecondary attainment, once again faculty members are called upon to be an active partner in developing solutions at the institutional level.

FACULTY-STUDENT INTERACTION: 3 APPROACHES

Think about the average course load of the typical undergraduate: it already gives students a considerable amount of time with faculty members on campuses. So rather than simply focus on maximizing interactions between students and faculty members, campuses should prioritize the quality and structure of those relationships, according to interviews with more than a dozen academic leaders, professors, and scholars.

My research has revealed three strategies for building the right culture in academic units and among individual professors to increase the chances that student-faculty interactions will result in the formation of high-impact relationships with staying power.

The **classroom strategy** turns the typical classroom experience into active and collaborative learning that reframes the role of the professor from the “sage on the stage” to a coach. This strategy allows students to get to know a professor better and assists with hands-on projects, personalized learning, and research.

The **enrichment strategy** establishes the role of professor as a critical piece of co-curricular activities on campuses much like coaches are to athletic teams.

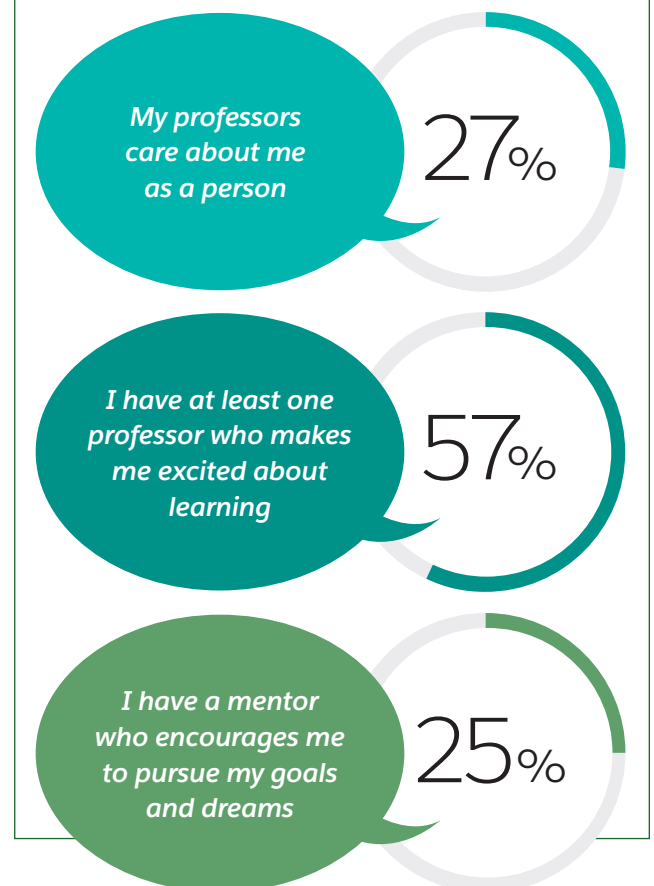
The **mentorship strategy** encourages structured outside-the-classroom time to help new students acclimate to the university.

Student Success Beyond College

Gallup has conducted several large-scale studies in recent years to look at the value of student-faculty interactions on success in college. In addition to the Gallup-Purdue Index, another survey, conducted in partnership with Strada Education Network of more than 32,000 undergraduates, found six collegiate experiences that were linked to students’ confidence that they have the knowledge and skills to succeed in the job market. The more of these experiences students had, the more confident they are they’ll graduate with the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in the job market.

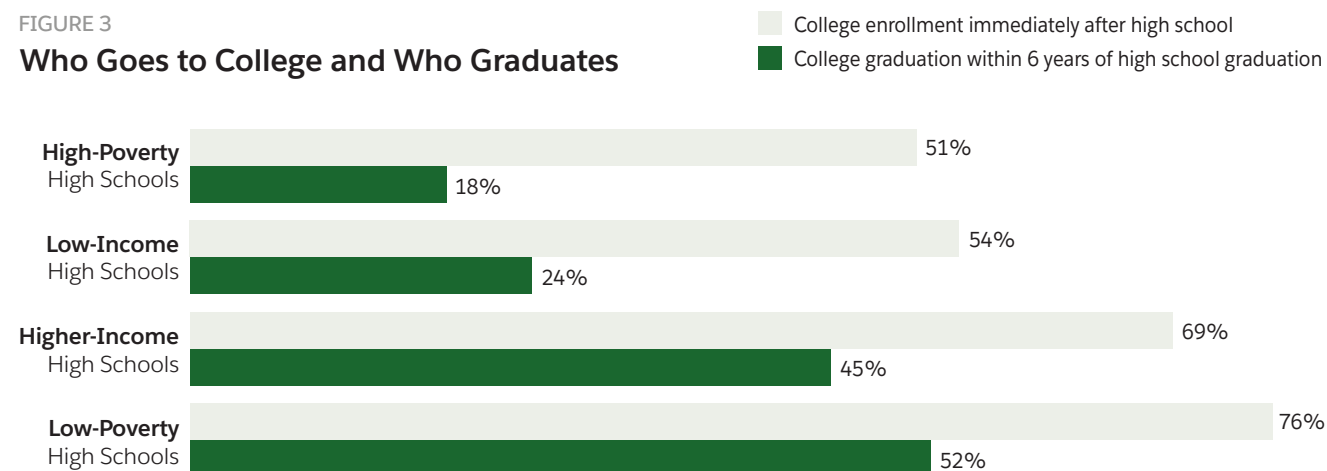
Three of the six experiences are related to mentorship and faculty-student interactions.

Percentage who “strongly agree”



Source: Strada-Gallup College Student Survey, 2019

FIGURE 3
Who Goes to College and Who Graduates



Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center

4 Waves

of the Student Success Movement

1970-1980: Birth of a Movement

Research emerges on how a student's commitment to earning a degree is linked to engagement in the college community. The result of this work is the creation of new campus programs focused on student success.

1980-2000: The Retention Wave

Demographic changes lead to enrollment declines and force colleges to focus on keeping students, not just enrolling them. Institutions invest in student services by centralizing advising. Today, more than 75% of colleges use either full-time advisors or a combination of professional advisors and faculty to help students with academic counseling.

2000-Current: The Technology Wave

New technology, such as predictive analytics, adaptive software and AI, better identifies students who need extra support, assists in schedule planning, redesigns classroom pedagogy, and employs chat-bots to help at-risk students navigate the campus.

The Future: The Faculty Wave

Rather than replace or compete with technology and staff efforts, faculty members will complement both as the "third pillar" in student success. They will provide a human touch in redesigning the classroom experience into active and collaborative learning spaces and establishing themselves as another set of critical mentors for student success.

Source: Author research; Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski, "Integration, motivation, strengths and optimism: Retention theories past, present and future," (2011).

"Human contact, especially face to face, seems to have an unusual influence on what students choose to do, on the directions their careers take, and on their experiences of college."

Dan Chambliss, *How College Works*

STRATEGY #1: THE CLASSROOM

Knowledge is everywhere for today's students. If they don't know an answer to a question, they are accustomed to searching instantaneously on Google while doing homework or standing in line in the dining hall. If they don't understand a concept being explained by a professor in a course, they are known to call up a YouTube video of someone else teaching the same theory while still sitting in the back of the classroom. They want learning that is customized, collaborative, and hands-on.

As a result, colleges have redesigned classrooms to make them more spacious and less hierarchical, allowing professors to roam around as they talk or check on students as they are working. At the same time, academic departments have revamped courses to involve students in their learning by flipping the classroom — making lectures available in advance and dedicating class time to discussions and problem solving.

An often overlooked piece of course redesign, however, is the actual faculty member's interaction with students. Too often professors move into a new classroom and approach their students in the same way as in the past, only in a new space and format.

The foundation of the classroom strategy is to regard the professor like an advisor at Apple's Genius Bar. One minute the professor might huddle with a small group of students around a whiteboard working on a problem and the next minute provide advice to an undergraduate designing a research project. The

professor plays no single role in every class. The key is flexibility between courses and even individual class meetings. No class needs to look and feel the same way from week to week.

In many ways, this design is a throwback to preschool classrooms where teachers observe and intervene as needed while children move from art projects to science experiments to the playground. In this scenario, the classroom is centered around the student, rather than the teacher. It allows both the student and the teacher to interact with each other more frequently than if the instructor were planted in the front of the room.

Such a strategy would be especially useful to students in their first year of college when getting to know a faculty member is crucial, but when students are often stuck in large lecture classes. "The best teachers should be teaching intro classes," Chambliss said. "When they do, they're put in the best position to mentor students and even direct them to other helpful faculty."

STRATEGY #2: ENRICHMENT

Students learn best when they apply theories in real-world situations — they use the knowledge immediately, and perhaps just as important, know why they use it. But in most traditional undergraduate programs, students might study a concept in the fourth week of a semester, but not use it until two semesters later, by which time they probably have forgotten what they learned.



Co-curricular activities allow students to immediately put their learning to work, yet the message undergraduates often receive from faculty and administrators is that such activities shouldn't distract from the classroom.

“A large part of learning happens outside the walls of the classroom,” said Randy Bass, vice provost for education at Georgetown University, “yet we only seem to value and give credit to what happens at the core of the undergraduate academic experience.”

The enrichment approach breaks down the stark divisions that usually exist between curricular and co-curricular learning by giving faculty larger roles in activities outside the classroom. While professors might already serve as an advisor to campus clubs, their role is usually trivial and they are neither compensated much, if at all, or rewarded in the tenure and promotion process.

This approach would make the faculty member akin to a coach on an athletic team — with sustained and regular contact with undergraduates — instead of a traditional instructor who teaches a student for a few hours a week and maybe for just one semester.

Under this model, co-curricular work would no longer be considered an add-on to the undergraduate experience. Rather, it would be part and parcel of the degree, in some cases giving students academic credit. This model could even allow students to alternate between periods in the classroom and stretches in co-curricular activities during the core of their day.

Most important, by integrating faculty members into co-curricular activities, students would have the opportunity to interact with professors more often and in different learning situations than the classroom.



STRATEGY #3: MENTORSHIP

Under this scenario, colleges create the specific conditions that make relationships more likely to form by weaving in opportunities for faculty and students to work together from the first day of college.

Because the average undergraduate might have only 25 teachers over the course of a college career, there are limited opportunities for students to become engaged with faculty. This model builds on the previous two strategies and puts mentorships directly into the curriculum.

In addition to being assigned academic advisors to assist with course planning and scheduling questions, students would also be assigned a mentor outside of their major at the start of college. Mentors would mostly meet with students in cohorts, giving undergraduates a sense of belonging in those critical first weeks of college. Mentorship would also help

connect students with yet another professor early in their college career. Think of this model as the college version of homeroom in high school — a gathering space for students to learn about the mechanics of college and meet a professor without the pressures of an academic class (see case study on Denison University, page 56).

Several colleges already are using many of the ingredients of this model by creating “meta-majors.” With meta-majors, incoming students choose from large academic and workforce fields, such as business, education and STEM, instead of narrow traditional majors, such as accounting or chemistry. First semester, students gather in learning communities and register for a block of general-education courses within that meta-major. Programming is designed so that students get to know the differences between majors within the field and get to know a professor well.



WHAT'S NEXT

The student-success movement is on the cusp of its next wave, one that combines the power of technology and staff members with important face-to-face interactions between students and faculty. While the movement has achieved significant success on campuses over the last forty years, colleges also risk initiative fatigue. Based on my research, there are four important things campus leaders can do to better integrate faculty members into their student success efforts.

First, establish a culture of student success with specific goals in the context of your institution. Colleges often copy solutions from their peers without properly defining the problem at their own institution. Failing to adequately figure out what the institution is trying to solve oftentimes frustrates faculty. Professors will be more committed to the cause if they know what success looks like and how they can be part of reaching that goal, including how they should employ technology and work alongside staff members.

Second, innovation in this space demands a commitment to equity and inclusion and adopting technology that focuses on the learners who most need help. The student pipeline to higher education is quickly changing and many faculty members remain unprepared. This requires institutions to think differently about how they recruit and retain students if they are going to remain relevant in the decade ahead. With a habit of research and analysis, many academics are uncomfortable navigating the ambiguity of institutional decision making, preferring to stay with known approaches rather than move the organization forward without guarantees of success.

Third, be willing to experiment. Encourage faculty and staff to work together to solve problems by listening and watching students and designing solutions that fix the issue at hand. Too often, student success measures are designed by sitting around a conference table, not by actually observing students in their environment. Failure should be acceptable, but projects that work should be scaled across an

institution and not simply exist as a boutique program within an academic unit.

Finally, develop incentives for faculty members and staff to work in concert with technology solutions. People work toward what's rewarded. If student success is important for faculty members to be part of, then show it in tenure and promotion policies. Institutions should use incentives to encourage more cross-collaboration between faculty and staff members as well as between department and schools around student success.

Even as the approaches of colleges evolve, so does the definition of the student-success movement. Ever since the Great Recession, student success has not only meant graduating from college, but also succeeding after college. Moving faculty from the sidelines to the center of student success efforts of campus is critical to maintaining momentum and moving the graduation numbers ever upward.

Case Study

USING TECHNOLOGY TO ENCOURAGE MENTORSHIP

The University of Maryland at College Park is a massive public flagship institution, with 40,000 students, 4,600 faculty, and a dozen colleges. At Maryland, like on most college campuses, professors and their disciplines are often siloed within academic units, while students explore courses across departments and combine majors and minors without regard to invisible boundaries.

But those boundaries can sometimes turn into barriers for students, particularly in academic advising. Advisors at Maryland, which include both professors and professional staff members, use a patchwork of systems to schedule meetings with students and track the academic progress of their advisees. As a result, there is no campus-wide way for advisors to share information with each other. The lack of a single, comprehensive advising record frustrates students and

sometimes leaves them with conflicting advice.

"Students expect an Amazon experience," said Katherine F. Russell, an associate dean in Maryland's College of Behavioral and Social Sciences. "They want seamless advising campus-wide."

Russell is helping build such a system at Maryland. The new platform, called TerpEngage (named after the university's Terrapin mascot) is scheduled to be available to students and advisors during the 2019-20 academic year. It will allow students to make appointments with their advisors on mobile devices, give them access to records and notes from meetings, and enable advisors to more easily share comments with their colleagues.

TerpEngage, Russell believes, will have a major impact on student success by encouraging more worthwhile face-to-face interactions between undergraduates and faculty members. Right now, when students meet their advisors, much of that time is spent

explaining university procedures and completing forms. Most of those back-and-forth discussions and the related paperwork will move to the new advising system. That will free time for advisors and students to engage in conversations about majors, campus activities, and careers.

"We're still a brick-and-mortar campus and need to double-down on those face-to-face interactions," Russell said.

The workforce new college graduates are entering, Russell said, requires them to navigate ever-changing industries and apply their knowledge in ambiguous situations. While many undergraduates are well versed — through their coursework — in the skills they need for today's job, they sometimes lack the ability to apply judgement in uncertain situations in the workplace. Developing those soft skills — such as problem-solving and communication — often comes outside the classroom and as a result of working with mentors, who could be coaches, professors, staff members, and

of course, advisors.

If advisors don't have the time to develop professional relationships with students, chances are slim they will ever become a mentor. Building the tools to help advisors spend more time talking with students about things that matter in life and less on the bureaucracy of the university is critical to encouraging mentorship.

Case Study

BUILDING ADVISING CIRCLES TO ASSIST FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

In 2008, Denison University developed Advising Circles, one-credit, pass/fail classes for freshmen, a "homeroom for college," said Mark Moller, the dean of first year students and director of academic advising.

Advising Circles allow students to connect with faculty early on and during critical moments in their first year at Denison, a small liberal-arts institution in Ohio with 2,300 undergraduate students. The Circles are capped at a dozen students and are led by a faculty member. They meet weekly in the fall semester and monthly in the spring. The Circles are optional, but about 80 percent of freshmen sign up for one.

Although faculty members have freedom over how their circles are run, topics commonly discussed include stress management, academic planning, and midterm grades. Faculty advisors often plan activities for the class but recognize that the course is meant to adapt to the needs of students. Faculty also bring in outside advisors, such as those in the university's career center, to expose first-year students to resources on campus.

Faculty buy-in is crucial to the success of the program, Moller said. In any given year, 25 percent of professors lead an Advising Circle; two-thirds have taught one at some point in the past. The Circles have also changed how professors approach advising. Because of the interactions in advising circles, Moller said faculty

members are more fully embracing their role as advisors. Indeed, in a survey of faculty, 90 percent said that leading an Advising Circle improved their relationships with their advisees. Interactions with students have become less transactional — focused only on answering a specific question or signing a form — as faculty advisors learn about advisees and the first-year experience, in general.

The results have been equally positive for students. Some 94 percent of students who take an Advising Circle said they found it valuable and would recommend it to others. Denison has found that participation in an Advising Circle increases student retention for freshmen by 3 percent. The benefits are even more significant for male students, who have higher levels of engagement with their advisors if they take an Advising Circle. Now Denison is working to ensure that this increased engagement cuts across the whole student body, Moller said, by piloting Advising Circles targeted at students from specific demographic backgrounds and with certain academic interests.

SOURCES

- 1 Demetriou, C. & Schmitz-Sciborski, A. (2011). Integration, motivation, strengths and optimism: Retention theories past, present and future. In R. Hayes (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 7th National Symposium on Student Retention*, 2011, Charleston. (pp. 300-312). Norman, OK: The University of Oklahoma.
- 2 Umbach, Paul D., and Matthew R. Wawrzynski. "Faculty Do Matter: The Role of College Faculty in Student Learning and Engagement." *Research in Higher Education*, Volume 46, Issue 2 (2005): 153-184.
- 3 Ray, Julie, and Stephanie Marken. "Life in College Matters for Life After College," May 6, 2014. news.gallup.com/poll/168848/life-college-matters-life-college.aspx
- 4 Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. *Knocking at the College Door, Projections of High School Graduates Through 2032*. knocking.wiche.edu



Engaging Lifelong Relationships



The old model of higher education, where students interacted with a college during a specific time in their lives, and then were launched into the world to work, no longer applies in an age when institutions want to build deeper ties with their constituents and alumni than ever before.

Today, building affinity means forging a lifetime commitment to students throughout their learning journey.

How we learn, how we work, and how we engage with each other is changing at an unprecedented rate, and higher education needs to catch up. In every sense, the pressure is on colleges and universities to innovate, better support alumni, and attract working learners throughout their careers.

On the front end of college, students see the main value of higher education as providing them access to a job on the other end. But the signal of the college degree in the modern workforce is filled with more

noise for employers these days given the skills needed to keep up in almost any job are increasingly churning at a faster rate (see Figure 1).

Some 80 percent of the workforce does not have the skills they need for most of the jobs that will be available in the next decade, according to the McKinsey Global Institute. Workers will therefore need to proactively seek out educational opportunities to be competitive candidates for careers that may not currently exist. Universities must fill that need, supplying their students and alumni with support throughout their careers and approaching students as customers worth maintaining a lifetime relationship with.

With colleges facing a demographic cliff — the traditional college-going population is projected to plummet in 2026 — institutions also need to differentiate what they offer students at the point of admission. Even selective colleges must prepare for a future in which they are obliged to draw from a wider pool of prospective students, likely with different needs than those they currently serve.

As students increasingly weigh the return on investment of a college degree in the future, the value of an institution's alumni network and engagement will play a key role in their decisions about where to enroll. Moreover, a focus on lifelong learning has the capacity to expand the pool of potential students beyond 18-year-olds.

Given this complex constellation of factors, colleges must rethink their relationship with alumni over the decades, maximizing the opportunity for renewed relevance throughout their students' lives.

A MORE VALUABLE NETWORK

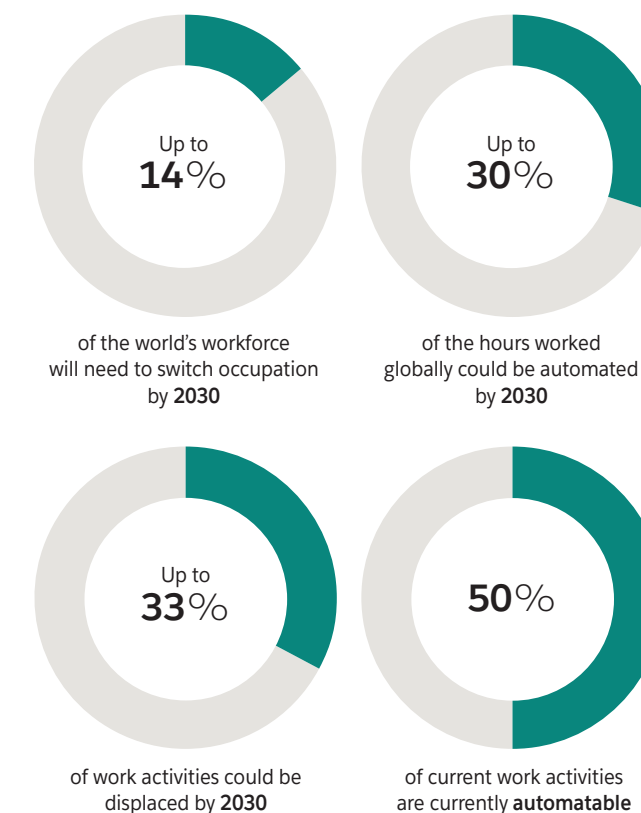
In the decades before social media, colleges played a critical role in keeping students in touch with old friends or forgotten peers. Satisfied graduates might describe the value of their connections with friends, professors, and mentors, and credit their college for helping to keep these networks alive through alumni events and campus meet-ups.

But recently, alumni have not needed to rely on universities to help them maintain their networks, which can be done almost automatically online. That doesn't mean there isn't a role for colleges to play in developing those networks. Instead, institutions have a new responsibility to create networking opportunities among students, faculty members, and administrators throughout their lives. That might involve bringing faculty members and alumni together to cooperate on new projects or fostering intergenerational connections, where older alumni play an active role in supporting current students or new graduates.

At the United States Military Academy at West Point,

FIGURE 1
The Changing World of Work

Global megatrends, such as accelerated automation and falling birth rates, are already changing employment. Many long-established employment trends may be dramatically altered or disappear entirely.



Source: McKinsey Global Institute

for instance, each incoming class is sponsored by another, creating a link between the class of 2019 and 1967, to take a recent example, where there would otherwise have been none.

In some cases, building affinity is a natural consequence of keeping students connected and engaged after they leave campus, even if it's not the primary objective. At the University of Michigan, alumni are often called upon to offer mentoring or professional opportunities to current students. Affiliate groups within the alumni association, even though they are of different generations, connect

over a shared heritage and tell their stories to the broader alumni population. “There’s a need to give back beyond dollars and cents,” says Dave Schueler, Michigan’s vice president of alumni engagement.

When you ask satisfied graduates what they have carried away from their college experience, you will probably hear about people. The modern role of colleges must be to help foster these relationships, adding the most valuable nodes of networks and then deploying them properly. The power of networks during and after college, research suggests, is linked to academic success and even graduates’ well-being, which in turn, fosters goodwill between alumni and their alma maters (see Figure 2).

TREASURE, TIME AND TALENT

The relationship between alumni and their colleges has long consisted of little more than annual weekend gatherings and pleas for financial support. That’s no

longer sufficient. With so many calls to donate to crowdfunding and worthy causes across social media, prospective donors are overwhelmed: When it comes to supporting colleges, the bar is higher than ever.

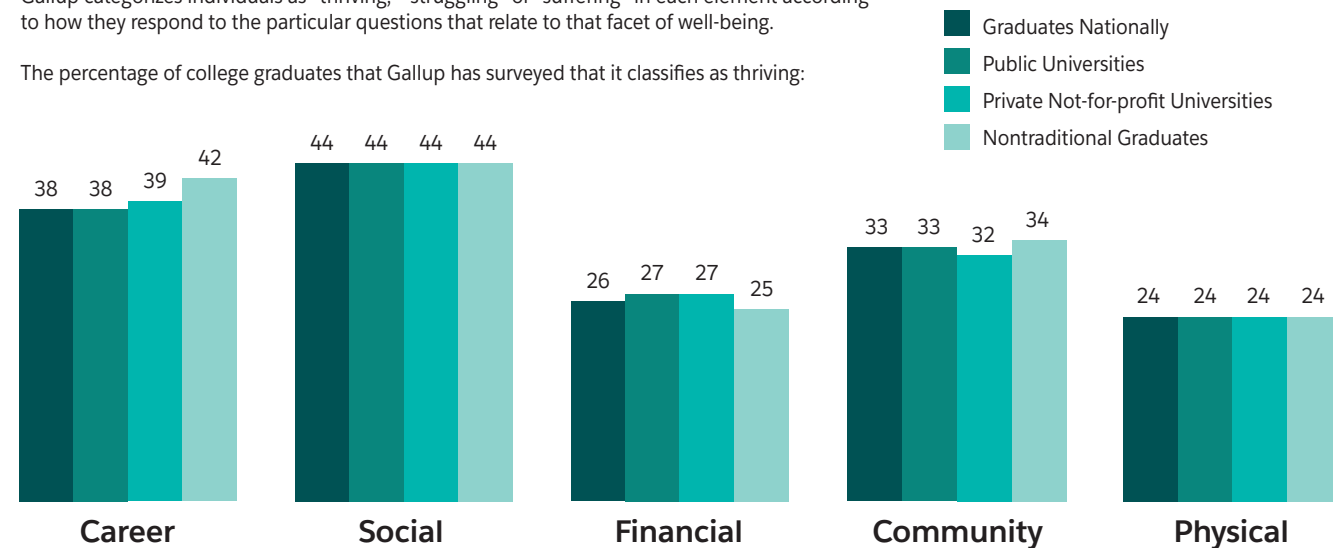
A more successful avenue involves giving donors the opportunity to give to an idea, rather than some faceless fund or physical building. Michael Bloomberg’s gift of \$1.8 billion to his alma mater Johns Hopkins University, which assures permanent need-blind admissions, is one of the more famous examples of this. But there are many others on a less titanic scale, encompassing career services, student recruitment, or cutting-edge academic programs. Consider the University of California at Los Angeles, where donors have opportunities to give to a variety of different projects, including helping students in crisis with food insecurity or supporting a summer accelerator for entrepreneurs.

FIGURE 2
College Graduates Struggling to Thrive

Gallup measures the important aspects of a life well-lived in five areas: liking what you do (Career); having strong and supportive relationships (Social); managing your economic life to reduce stress (Financial); liking where you live (Community); and having good health (Physical).

Gallup categorizes individuals as “thriving,” “struggling” or “suffering” in each element according to how they respond to the particular questions that relate to that facet of well-being.

The percentage of college graduates that Gallup has surveyed that it classifies as thriving:



Source: Gallup

...what alumni choose to or are able to give may change over the course of their lifetime, in the same way that their expectations and desires of an alumni association are also likely to shift.

Building affinity around all facets of the university allows institutions to create support for ideas — much like nonprofit organizations do — and not just around a single physical place. No matter what, the key element is hardwiring narratives into the solicitation process to prospective donors. The University of Florida Foundation, for instance, has developed a one-day “Storytelling Academy” workshop, helping participants across the university better capture the essence of their department for proposals.

Admittedly, not every college needs to work quite so hard to secure dollars. Nearly 30 percent of the \$49 billion contributed to higher education in the U.S. in 2019 went to just 20 institutions, according to data from the Council for Aid to Education. More than 4,000 others must share the remaining 72 percent, requiring innovative tactics when it comes to advancement (see Figure 3).

More often than not, donors’ ability to give is tied to their net worth, and that is heavily influenced by the wealth of previous generations in their families. So, for colleges that don’t consider financial need in admitting students or have a mission to enroll more low-income students, the road to soliciting donations from those graduates one day is even longer.

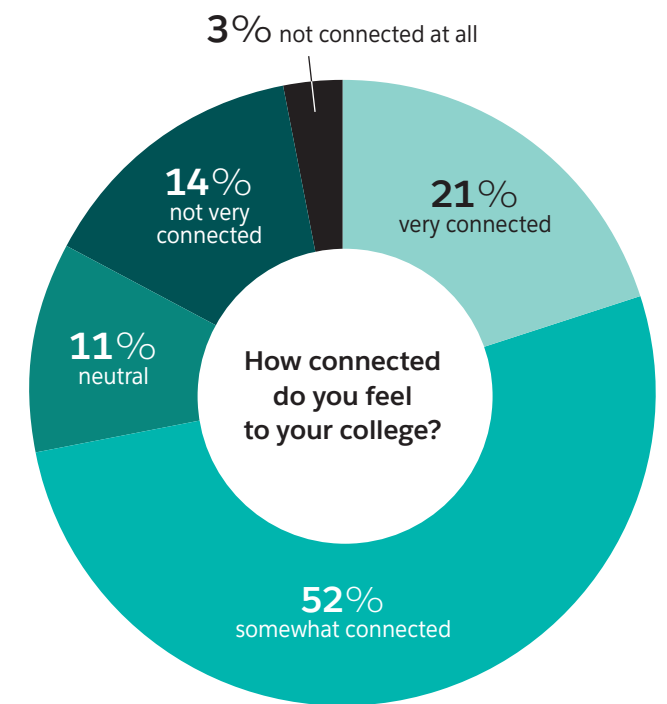
For many universities, therefore, identifying ways to give will require a fresh approach to what counts as a contribution. Though not all alumni may be able to give the traditional “treasure,” their “time” or “talent” could be even more valuable. This contribution might take the form of a one-off speaking engagement, a

mentoring opportunity, or even adjunct teaching. But at the moment, most colleges aren’t intentional in soliciting this kind of support from alumni or give them the opportunity to offer it on their own.

Critically, what alumni choose to or are able to give may change over the course of their lifetime, in the same way that their expectations and desires of an alumni association are also likely to shift. Rather than issuing boilerplate letters to alumni regardless of demographics, relationship with the college, or stage of life, building affinity requires a dynamic approach. Colleges have for too long neglected actually learning about their constituents, or taking advantage of the data on alumni outcomes, preferences, and circumstances in both fundraising and building affinity.

FIGURE 3
Engaged Donors Want to Give

Without sustained efforts to build affinity, it’s hard to persuade young alumni to contribute. More than 80% of those who donated to their alma mater said they felt “very connected” to the institution. But this group is a minority.



Source: Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2020 National Young Alumni Survey

THREE APPROACHES TO BUILDING AFFINITY

Reaching the next generation of alumni requires a shift in mindset and approach. If colleges expect students to make lifelong commitments to their colleges via donations and gifts, colleges need to take forward-looking steps to take similar responsibility for the learning and professional growth of their alumni.

In interviews with university leaders across many different functions in higher education, I've identified three strategies to support that learning, help alumni build meaningful connections, and put students in the best possible position to succeed:

Continual advising acknowledges a lifetime of professional growth, connecting students to resources to help guide them through a changing world.

A platform for lifelong learning uses cutting-edge technology to give students agency over their learning and credentials, allowing them to upskill throughout their careers as part of a robust virtual community.

A data-driven approach would put data to use to provide alumni what they need, when they need it.

1. CONTINUAL ADVISING

More than 40 percent of baby boomers remained in a job for two decades or more, according to a recent survey by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. It's a professional context that no longer exists: If current trends continue, the employee of the future might have as many as 15 different jobs, each spanning five years or less, over a career of 60 years (see Figure 4). Each will require new skills, new approaches, and careful coaching. Universities should position themselves to offer all three.

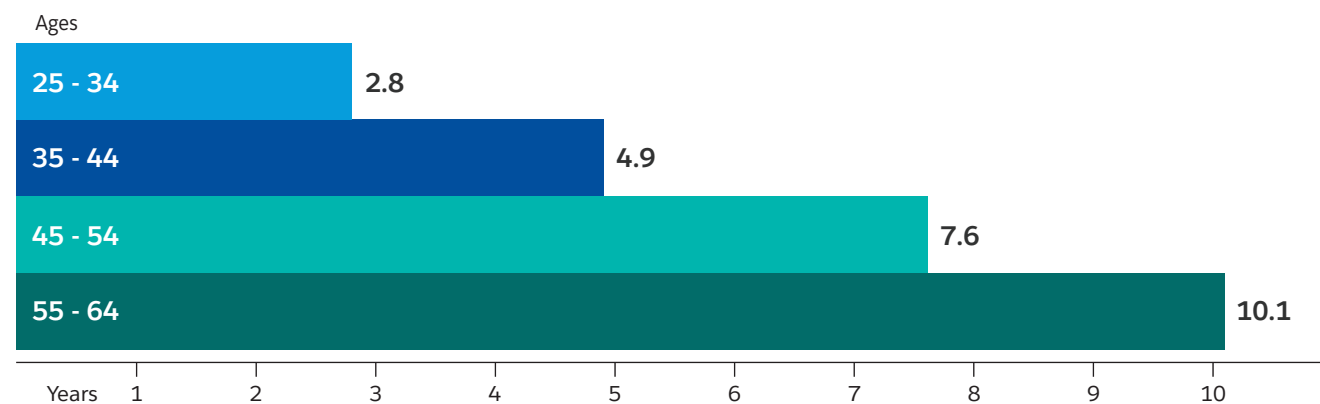
Academic and career advising, in particular, should not end with graduation. Someone contemplating a new career path or a pivot to becoming self-employed might ask for support from fellow alumni or faculty, further allowing graduates to bolster their network. At the same time, a recent graduate entering a challenging field might ask to be connected to successful alumni in that field for mentorship and guidance.

At many colleges, the coronavirus pandemic helped to accelerate virtual advisory services already in place. Increasingly, students and workers alike are comfortable with entirely remote services, while lockdown restrictions have helped alumni associations



FIGURE 4
Younger People Are More Inclined to Change Jobs

Median job duration for workers by age range



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

If colleges expect students to make lifelong commitments to their colleges via donations and gifts, colleges need to take forward-looking steps to take similar responsibility for the learning and professional growth of their alumni.

identify which of their services are most essential. Many institutions are now weighing the possibility of a hybrid model, where regular virtual events are interspersed with sporadic opportunities for face-to-face support and connection.

The Georgia Institute of Technology has developed a highly effective virtual advising system, where students gain access to a network of advisors, to whom they can turn to for advice as their career progresses or their industry changes. While AI-powered advising services and career counseling are always available, many of the most valuable connections come from other alumni and friends of the university, who serve as mentors and supporters to classmates or new graduates.

For the past five years, the university has also been building the pieces of what it calls a Personal Board of Directors for each student, available for support long after their graduation date. While the Personal Board of Directors is meant as an asset for new graduates, older alumni have also welcomed the opportunity to contribute intellectually. Though many had already



volunteered their time as adjunct professors or helped Georgia Tech alumni navigate the labyrinthine world of internships, connecting alumni directly to students helped to maximize a previously untapped reservoir of expertise and goodwill.

2. A PLATFORM FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

A robust online alumni community will be the minimum requirement for advancement offices in the 21st century. To truly engage alumni, institutions need to deploy their unique selling proposition — that is, continuous learning.

Take the University of Washington as an example. The college's undergraduate computer science courses often focus on helping students develop easily applicable skills, allowing them lifetime literacy as programmers. When it comes to applying those skills post-graduation, many choose to return to Continuum College, the university's continuing education unit, to take courses in specific programming languages that may not have been relevant five or ten years earlier.

Lifelong Learning platforms may also be a way to bring new learners into the system, especially for colleges with a well-established brand. Harvard University's Division of Continuing Education, which offers courses for every stage of life, from high

school through to retirement, brings in more than \$450 million in tuition revenue, with some 30,000 enrollments a year. Between 2011 and 2018, revenue increased by more than 60 percent, compared to a 6.4 percent increase on university-wide tuition revenue over the same period.

The University of Washington, Harvard, and other best-in-class institutions are part of a new movement in higher education, where classroom learning spans not four years but the six decades of a current student's career. This 60-year curriculum, as it's sometimes called, could over time award students micro-credentials or badges, representing expertise in very specific competency areas. At the same time, to avoid disrupting students' lives, education would come to them, whether via video calls, online modules, or through some combination of in-person and remote learning.

To succeed in this endeavor, colleges need to invest in technology that can support these learners. At the moment, even applying for a master's degree program at one's alma mater is often a frustratingly bureaucratic procedure, where the college behaves as though it has no prior connection with the student. A successful platform would connect these silos, allowing a student to move seamlessly through the system and be recognized even after a five- or ten-year break from education. It might also serve as the primary way they connect with faculty or fellow alumni, including those they do not already know.

Lifelong Learning platforms may also be a way to bring new learners into the system, especially for colleges with a well-established brand.

Such a platform could also be used as infrastructure to allow alumni to digitally share and verify their credentials. Right now, proving one's academic qualifications is time-consuming and costly: Alumni

must brace themselves for the tedious process of contacting their university and asking for transcripts, often at a price.

Today's students face the daunting proposition of preparing for jobs that don't yet exist. For universities grappling with the same reality, there's no roadmap to what the right skills and courses for an unknown future might be. Instead, to be a competitive applicant, the next generation of workers may spend their adult lives sliding in and out of education, variously upskilling or retraining throughout their careers. The onus is on colleges and universities to provide that lifelong learning.

But there's no reason that transcripts, degrees, and credentials should not be portable, and move with

the student, rather than stay with the institution. One obvious solution, detailed in a recent white paper authored by the Digital Credentials Consortium, would be a secure digital platform, where sophisticated blockchain technology would give learners more control and rights over their lifelong learning record.

3. A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH

Whether advising alumni, planning fundraising campaigns, or trying to connect former students to opportunities, colleges have a responsibility to make themselves accountable to the data available.

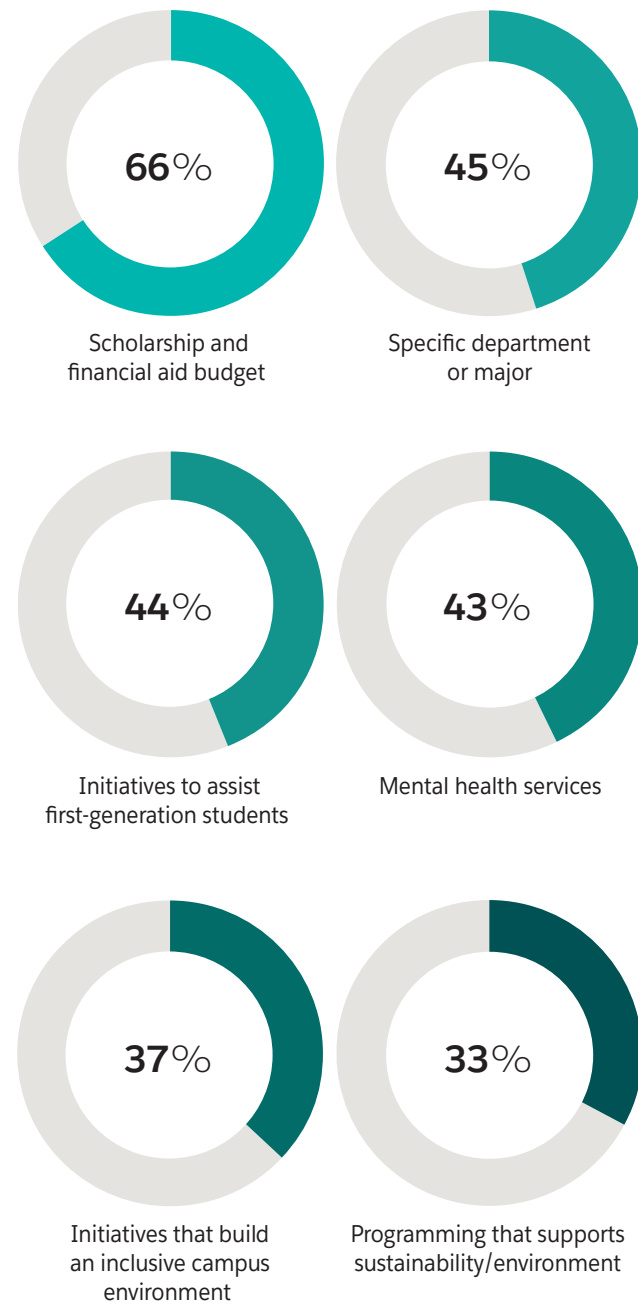
At Wake Forest University, for instance, the college has developed key objectives around student outcomes. The process has allowed the university to identify which students are successful and why, producing



FIGURE 5
Different Generations Give Differently

Millennial donors want to support their college—but they need to be convinced of the value of the mission.

Top areas of interest for young alumni who had donated since graduation.



Source: Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2020 National Young Alumni Survey

huge quantities of rich data, says Andy Chan, vice president of innovation and personal and career development. “But it also shows us which ones aren’t as well engaged,” he adds, “so we can see if we can do anything to activate them.”

Data might also be usefully employed to measure what services alumni gravitate toward, especially when making budgeting decisions, and it can be used to inform fundraising efforts. Though young alumni comprise more than 30 percent of all graduates in higher education, less than 10 percent of institutions surveyed by the National Young Alumni Survey indicated that they were a top priority. That’s despite the fact that research consistently shows that the best way to ask alumni for support is through engaging with them (see Figure 5).

As the federal government publishes additional information on graduate outcomes, particularly using salary data, it’s critical that institutions distribute their own information about their graduates beyond earnings, to give alumni a sense of what they are contributing to, in addition to highlighting the particular strengths of individual programs. At a time of public reckoning around diversity and inclusion, it’s in higher educational institutions’ interest to make data on class make-up public, and to highlight strengths wherever they can be found.

It all contributes to a new philosophy that universities must be prepared to adopt: Students are customers as much as they are learners. Giving them the best possible product means looking at the available evidence in decision-making, making the most of the ample resources currently underused through alumni networks, and committing to a lifelong relationship of learning and mentorship. If your institution wants to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage in the years ahead, a connected, lifetime approach for alumni needs to be a fundamental part of your strategy.



[Salesforce.org](https://www.salesforce.org) is the social impact center of Salesforce focused on partnering with the global community of changemakers. We provide access to powerful technology that empowers changemakers to build a better world. We are a unique business unit dedicated to creating solutions for nonprofit, educational, and philanthropic organizations so they can have greater impact. Operating within Salesforce, a for-profit entity, increases our capacity to innovate on top of the world’s #1 CRM platform, to channel the pro-bono power of more than 45,000 Salesforce employees, and to inspire Salesforce customers and partners to join our global movement for good. Visit www.salesforce.org for more.