EAB

The Student Success Playbook

14 recommendations to improve student outcomes and ensure financial sustainability across the next decade

The Challenge Ahead

American higher education has enjoyed a multi-decade-long enrollment expansion that may soon come to an end. American birth rates that stagnated in the 2000s fell precipitously during the Great Recession and have yet to recover. While the full impact of demographic contraction remains to be seen, smart colleges and universities are taking measures now to prepare.

Independent forecasts from the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) and demographer Nathan Grawe are calling attention to the impact of declining Gen Z birth rates on the population of high school graduates and subsequent college-goers. This contraction, which has already affected the Northeast and Midwest for several years, is predicted to go nationwide by 2030 as we feel the echo of Great Recession birth-rate declines.

The good news is that the value of a college degree continues to be strong. College participation, as measured as a share of the population, will continue to rise, driven by an economy that is increasingly dependent on knowledge workers. The need for college-educated workers is so strong that more than forty states have set formal degree attainment targets of at least 60% for their early-career population.

Thriving in the years to come will require institutions to reshape their enrollment strategies. For decades, colleges could count on revenue from a steadily increasing supply of college-going high school graduates. While individual institutions have struggled at times, most college leaders rose through the ranks during a time of sustained growth and have never had to face a sector-wide enrollment contraction that impacts nearly all schools. What lies ahead requires new thinking.

Predictably, the initial response has been to redouble recruitment efforts. Many schools are trying to expand their geographic range and enter new markets, while

others are trying to establish new programs to tap the still growing population of adult and online learners. These markets have become increasingly competitive, a trend that is likely to continue.

Yet, recruitment is only one part of an enrollment strategy. The earliest formulations of what we now refer to as Strategic Enrollment Management called on leaders to address the entire student lifecycle and recognize the importance of retaining students once they matriculate. Years of easy growth have overemphasized recruitment and admissions while overlooking retention, so much so that they are rarely part of the same conversation at most schools.

The time has come to bring student retention back into this conversation. We appropriately think about student attrition as a manifestation of unfulfilled ambitions, yet we rarely consider the financial impact to the school. For most institutions, student attrition represents a massive annual loss in sunk recruitment costs and unrealized tuition.

There are many more tuition dollars in play than most administrators and faculty realize. EAB has amassed dozens of case studies that demonstrate how improving retention by just a few points can potentially preserve millions of dollars in tuition, depending on the size of the institution. This revenue goes a long way toward offsetting declines in new student enrollment.

Some institutions may feel uncomfortable making this connection between student retention and revenue. This is understandable. For years we have approached student success from the standpoint of engagement and development. Retaining students is just the "right thing to do"—a moral imperative to deliver on the trust that students have invested in their school. It feels intuitively wrong to think about retaining students in terms of the financial contribution they make to their institution, but it is impossible to escape the truism that improving persistence rates is ultimately good for the top line.

The recommendations in this report aim to help you and your leadership team reshape your student success strategy in preparation for the anticipated enrollment downturn of the 2020s. What follows is summative insight and guidance from hundreds of EAB researchers and in-field practitioners gathered over the last decade.

We have distilled this decade of research and implementation experience into a series of fourteen recommendations. Not all recommendations are right for all institutions, but we believe all institutions will benefit from incorporating at least some of these ideas.

> We appropriately think about student attrition as a manifestation of unfulfilled ambitions, yet we rarely consider the financial impact to the school.

Is There a Business Case for Student Success?

Throughout this work we have chosen to view our recommendations, when appropriate, through the lens of enrollment revenue and return on investment (for student and for school). This necessarily forces student success leaders to think about students in much the same way as do their peers in admissions and marketing: students are consumers who are valued for what they contribute (tuition revenue) in exchange for a product or service (knowledge, social mobility, and personal development). In doing so, we invite you to explore what you might do differently if you saw your student success strategy in this way.

To be clear, this approach does not imply colleges and universities should treat their students purely as consumers and thus themselves as businesses. Businesses have profit margins that drive decision-making in ways that would be inappropriate and counterproductive for nonprofit colleges and universities. Higher education works best when it is mission-driven, with students at the center.

However, thinking about students as consumers can serve as a useful and provocative teaching metaphor. Are there business practices around maintaining customer relationships that can be applied to student retention? How can they be applied in an ethical way that works in the best interest of the students we serve? What new investments would we make to achieve our enrollment, retention, and completion goals?

We have yet to see this "business case for student success" fully entered into the mainstream of the student success thought space. Thus, each section in this report is preceded by brief commentary that frames the constituent recommendations within the extended metaphor of customer relations:

▷ **In Part I**, we look at how student success practices and policies can value the student as a consumer in the same way that a business might value high-end recurring clients. This section invites readers to ask, "If higher education is a product and students are its consumers, are we doing everything we can to bring them back for another year?"

▷ **In Part II**, we explore student success practices and policies that honor the students as consumers by respecting the cost they pay for our product and increasing the value they get in return. This section seeks to reduce unnecessary costs and increase the postgraduate value of a degree.

Through this metaphor, we seek only to push your thinking in new ways and spark productive debate. It is incumbent on the reader to decide if and to what degree this mindset is useful for addressing the retention challenge on your home campus and ultimately serving your students better.

The severity and impact of the birth-rate decline is an open question, but most institutions recognize that retention efforts are not a wasted investment. Instead they sow the seeds for graduating more students, delivering on the shared objectives of both students and the institutions who serve them.

EAB is committed to helping you succeed. To that end we have tried whenever possible to include links to resources from EAB and others to support you on your journey. We invite you to engage with us as we move forward into the next decade together.

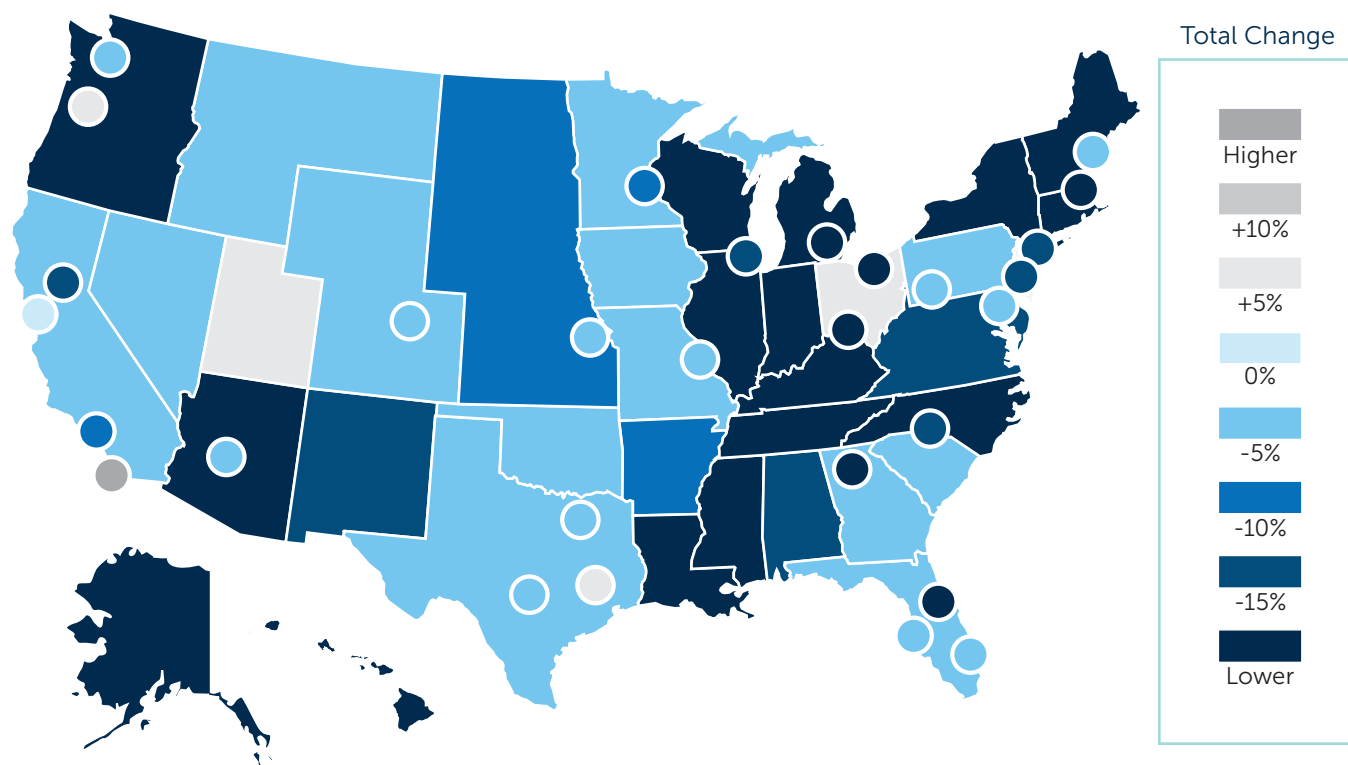# Forecasted Change in College-Going High School Graduates
Reproduced from data in Grawe (2018)

The **Higher Education Demand Index** (HEDI) developed by economist Nathan Grawe uses demographic and behavioral data to forecast changes in college-going high school graduates by city, state, and geographic region. Cities are reflective of their US Census metropolitan statistical areas. States are combined in some cases to reach a minimum threshold population to make forecasts.

Change from 2019 to 2024

Total Change

- Higher
- +10%
- +5%
- 0%
- -5%
- -10%
- -15%
- Lower

Change from 2019 to 2029

Total Change
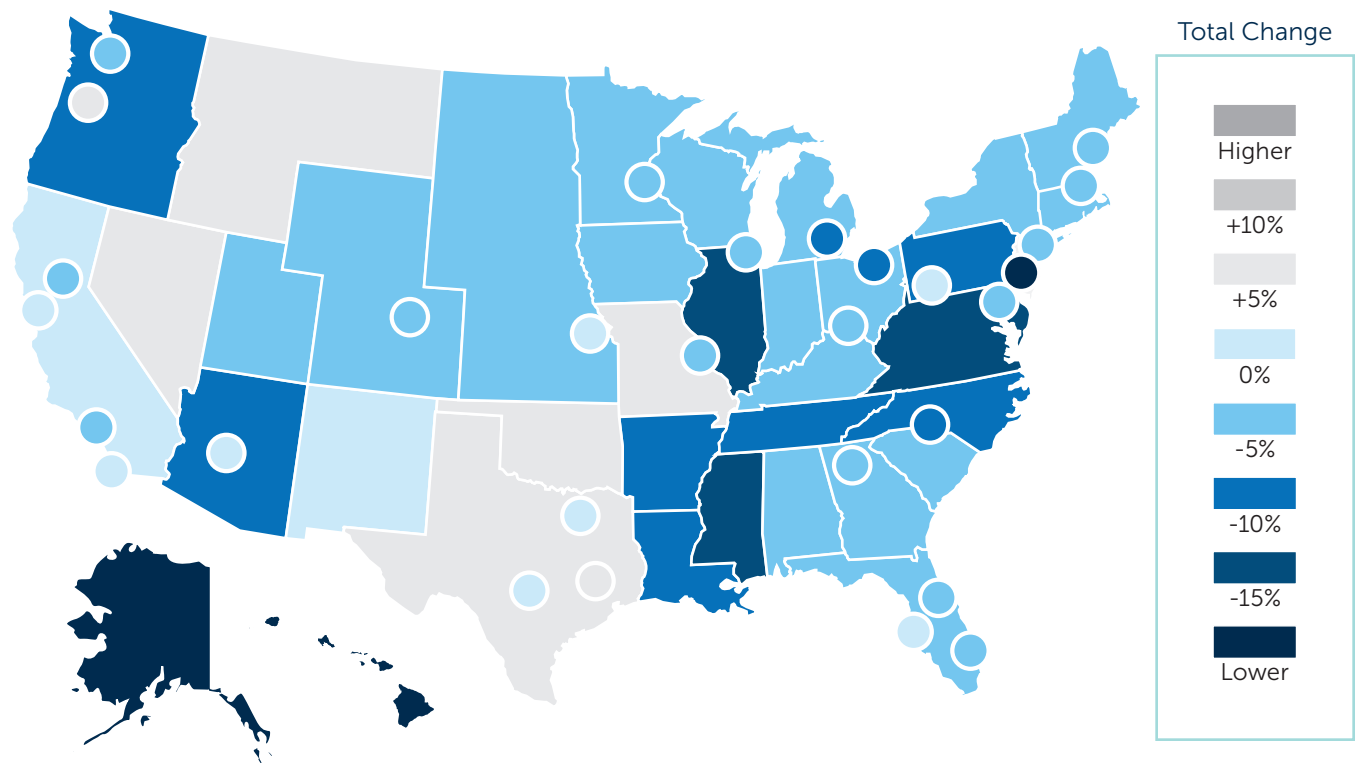
Higher
+10%
+5%
0%
−5%
−10%
−15%
Lower

📖 **Recommended Reading**

All higher education leaders should familiarize themselves with how student demographics are forecasted to change and contract in the 2020s. The two most prominent works on the subject are "Knocking at the College Door," a recurring report produced by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) over the last forty years, and Nathan Grawe's *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*. We have included links to each here.

▷ ACCESS HERE

▷ ACCESS HERE

DEMOGRAPHICS
and the
DEMAND
for
HIGHER
EDUCATION

NATHAN D. GRAWE

KNOCKING
AT THE COLLEGE DOOR
Projections of High School Graduates • December 2016

Peace Bransberger   Demarée K. Michelau

WICHE
Western Interstate Commission
for Higher Education

ACT   CollegeBoard

Viewing Retention and Enrollment Through the Lens of Equity

As the population of college-going high school seniors contracts, it will also become more diverse. Researchers forecast that students of color, especially Hispanic students, will continue to grow as a share of our national student population. Forward-looking student success strategies must include measures for supporting the increasing number of underserved students who are often left behind.

Higher education has a well-documented equity problem. Countless studies show that low-income students, first-generation students, and students of color complete college at lower rates than their peers from majority populations. Colleges and universities have for too long accepted policies and practices (or the absence thereof) that perpetuate and, in some cases, amplify demographic disparities in student outcomes.

Economist Raj Chetty and his colleagues at Opportunity Insights have published research on how college degrees foster social mobility by boosting low-income students to higher income brackets in adulthood. However, these analyses also reveal that some institutions are far better than others at delivering on this value.

Failing to address your equity gaps prevents your historically underserved students from fully benefiting from our educational system, perpetuating the very societal inequalities that we seek to mitigate. Our communities and our country will thrive only if colleges make it possible for underserved populations to have a fair chance to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed.

Student attrition represents enrollment leaks that need to be patched. Institutions that find they are disproportionately losing students from underserved populations need to put a disproportionate amount of attention and effort on closing retention gaps for these specific students.

Viewed this way, closing equity gaps not only helps students and advances society, but it also secures the long-term financial health of your institution.

Closing equity gaps is the right thing to do for students, society, and institutional mission. Aligning the moral imperative for equity with the business case for student success creates a powerful argument for change and investment. For many institutions, these investments have begun with multicultural student programming and diversity offices, no doubt a meaningful start. However, too often our attention and energy stop there. Instead, we need to approach diversity, equity, and inclusion as central to the health of the institution and thus inform everything we do around student success.

We are confident our country now possesses enough knowledge and technology to ensure every student can earn a degree, yet our student success efforts will not have their fullest impact unless we deliberately view them through the lens of supporting equitable outcomes. Thus, as we present the recommendations in this report, we will point out, wherever relevant, how the strategies will help us eliminate demographic disparities. Our hope is that implementing these practices, with a persistent focus on equity, will meaningfully move the needle on what is perhaps our biggest student success challenge.

Recommended Reading

OPPORTUNITY INSIGHTS

Education drives social mobility. The Opportunity Insights team at Harvard University documents these trends and provides invaluable data and research for college leaders seeking to better understand the impact of their institutions on students and society. Explore their work here: **opportunityinsights.org**

Table of Contents

What industries could higher education look to for advice on retaining students? The closest analogies might be high-end businesses that serve subscription-based clientele and depend on them to return again and again. Professional membership organizations, telecommunications companies, and your local gym are all examples of businesses that fit this description.

Businesses that rely on "renewing" clientele know that in order to be successful, they must continuously attract new clients and then retain these clients year after year to generate ongoing revenue. Some of these businesses might consider renewals even more important than signing up new customers and thus put a premium on service activities that drive customer loyalty.

Higher education gets only the first part of this equation right. Colleges and universities commit tremendous resources to admissions offices, marketing departments, and financial aid programs responsible for recruiting new students. They rarely make a corresponding investment to keep these students reenrolling for subsequent years. There is almost an implicit assumption that once enrolled, a student will not consider other options until he or she makes it to graduation.

What if we started to think about student retention more like we think about student recruitment? Some progressive colleges have already begun incorporating their enrollment management resources and processes into their student success strategy. EAB has been studying this trend for years and given it a name: Student Success Management. Three common themes emerge from institutions that are moving to this mindset.

First, these institutions strive to eliminate barriers that prevent students from reenrolling, tracking their progress by closely monitoring registration data in real time. Commonly encountered barriers demand systemic changes that streamline and simplify the reenrollment process, making it easier for students to return.

Second, these institutions hire accountable staff dedicated to making sure assigned cohorts of students have the support and guidance they need to return and thrive. These staff members fulfill roles similar to those of admission counselors, but with a focus on retention.

Third, these institutions put extra effort into resolving barriers which disproportionately affect populations that return at lower rates: students of color, first-generation students, and students from low-income backgrounds.

Part 1

PART 1

❯ Eliminating
Registration and
Financial Barriers

❯ Supporting Students
with Technology-
Enabled Advising

❯ Building Belonging
and Academic
Confidence

PART 2

❯ Reducing the Number
of Nonproductive
Credits

❯ Enhancing the
Value of the
Curriculum

Eliminating Registration and Financial Barriers

New and returning students face a surprising array of logistical barriers when trying to enroll in upcoming terms. In our work at EAB, we have been repeatedly surprised by inefficient registration and financial processes that impede enrollment and by how many students do not continue with college as a result of these entirely preventable barriers. Students from underserved backgrounds are often the most susceptible to reenrollment barriers, making this an important, if underappreciated, equity issue.

Renewal-based businesses go out of their way to make it easier for their clientele to continue to do business with them. So why does higher education make it so hard, especially at a time when reenrollment should be a top priority?

The problem, in our estimation, is that most of these barriers are fairly transactional in nature and thus have long been overlooked by leadership teams that tend to be focused on more strategic issues.

Smart leadership teams are getting into the trenches to score quick wins with retention by auditing reenrollment processes and removing or mitigating logistic and financial barriers. Many of the necessary changes are surprisingly straightforward and produce lasting change, resulting in a more student-friendly reenrollment system that allows student success efforts to be focused on higher-order problems.

Reform Administrative Processes and Policies

Background

Students navigate a myriad of administrative and academic policies throughout their time in college. Many of these policies govern the rules around course registration, major section, advising, and student account payments, all of which can have a negative impact on student retention if not properly deployed. These policies are usually well-meaning, but unfortunately many were created without careful analysis of their effects on student persistence or equity.

For example, overly strict major declaration policies may force a student to choose a program before he or she is ready, leading to disengagement, while overly lenient course-repeat policies might allow some students to repeat the same course without making progress toward a degree, driving up their loan burden.

Of chief concern are complex registration processes that add barriers and confuse students, needlessly discouraging them from reenrolling. The most common barriers are registration holds levied by offices in order to compel students to complete paperwork, pay balances, or carry out other transactions. These policies presume that students understand what is being asked of them and have the ability to resolve the issue and often don't take into consideration what happens to the student if he or she cannot comply.

EAB has found that most institutions have between 40 and 80 different kinds of registration holds. We have also found that most leadership teams do not regularly audit holds in order to eliminate those that unduly and unnecessarily hinder students from returning for another term. As years progress, holds tend to accumulate even if their original purpose is no longer relevant.

From a business standpoint, the least sensible registration holds are those triggered by small student account balances. While students should be expected to pay their bills, it makes little financial sense to let a balance of a few hundred dollars prevent an institution from collecting several thousand dollars in subsequent tuition revenue.

Guidance

EAB recommends creating a policy audit committee (or charging an existing policy committee) to review existing policies all at once, consider their cumulative impact on student success, and revise policies that create unintentional roadblocks to retention and graduation. We have developed diagnostics, such as the one linked below, to guide these discussions.

We also recommend that leadership teams use student feedback to surface the most problematic policies and processes. Ask advisors or other administrators to reach out, with an offer of help, to students who are out of compliance. Aggregate their responses and concerns to look for patterns that suggest systemic changes that need to be made. A good place to start is by reaching out to students who have not enrolled for the next term, such as staff from Kennesaw State describe doing in the blog post linked below. Reenrollment campaigns have the dual benefit of resolving barriers while also giving an important nudge to students who simply are procrastinating.

The results of exercises like these may prompt you to do a full registration hold audit. Start by reviewing the holds that affect the most students, and then work down the list. Meet with the directors of the

offices that originate the hold in order to understand their rationale and explore if other methods can help them meet their objectives. Consider including the CFO and university counsel in these conversations to provide a definitive perspective on the importance of each hold to the financial health and legal liability of the institution.

Financial holds are inevitably among the most common registration barriers faced by students. Many schools have provided relief by increasing financial hold thresholds to at least $500, with many raised as high as $1,000 or more. Your institution also should consider creating an emergency microgrant program to assist students with balances they cannot pay, a topic that we cover below in our next recommendation.

Some campus offices use holds to collect specific kinds of revenue, such as parking fines or housing fees. Multiple payment points can be confusing to students and should be centralized within the main student accounts office whenever possible. If that is not possible, consider temporarily lifting the hold to allow the student to register and giving the campus office more time to collect the balance.

Recommended Resources
Access source material, tools, and further reading on eab.com

Student Completion Policy Diagnostic

DIAGNOSTIC ➔

Improving Student Success in Just One Minute

BLOG ➔

Eliminate Administrative and Financial Barriers to Success

ROADMAP ➔
coming soon

Create an Emergency Microgrant Program

Background

Financial barriers drive more students out of school than any other factor. College is expensive, and students often struggle to pay. Much of this challenge is entirely outside of the control of the institution. Financial aid budgets are rarely big enough to cover all unmet need, and students can lose their aid if they do not complete verification procedures or fail to meet satisfactory academic progress (SAP) requirements.

However, not all financial issues are outside of institutional control. Nearly every school puts students on bursar hold if they have an outstanding balance above a threshold amount, preventing them from returning until they resolve the account. Even small balances of just a few hundred dollars can result in a financial hold.

Financial holds are thought of as forcing mechanisms for collecting owed revenue, but they often do just the opposite. Students who leave because of holds rarely return to pay their bills. Even worse, the institution loses the chance to collect tuition from these students in future semesters.

This is a "penny wise, pound foolish" approach that makes much less sense in a world where colleges and universities are increasingly dependent on tuition revenue. A wise business would never let an unpaid balance of a few hundred dollars prevent the realization of tens of thousands of dollars in future revenue.

And yet, this is shockingly common. Students have shoestring, unpredictable budgets and can run up unpaid balances very easily. Delays in financial aid or unexpected fees can also result in negative account balances. Often students won't even know they have a balance until they try to register and are prevented from doing so.

Guidance

Progressive institutions are putting in new policies to help students deal with temporary financial concerns and prevent attrition due to small balances. The first and most obvious change is to raise the threshold amount that triggers a financial hold. In the past, these threshold amounts may have been just a few hundred dollars, with some schools setting their threshold as low as a single dollar. Now schools are raising thresholds to $500 or higher, with some going as high as $1,000 or more.

A growing handful of institutions is also issuing tuition waivers or microgrants to qualified students who owe small balances, typically less than a thousand dollars. These institutions correctly reason that coverage of these small balances will pay for itself via tuition collected in future terms.

Institutions may use screening processes to prioritize certain students for microgrants. For example, you might choose to give priority to students from underserved populations, seniors close to completion, students who have a high predicted likelihood of graduation, or students who are experiencing temporary financial distress and just need some help to get over the hump.

Start-up funds for microgrant programs often come from an allocation from the president or board of regents. Other institutions have found success by funding or expanding microgrant programs through philanthrophic donations.

Recommended Resources
Access source material, tools, and further reading on eab.com

Incentivizing
Behavioral Change
with Aid Dollars

STUDY

3 Strategies to Deploy
Financial Aid at Critical
Inflection Points
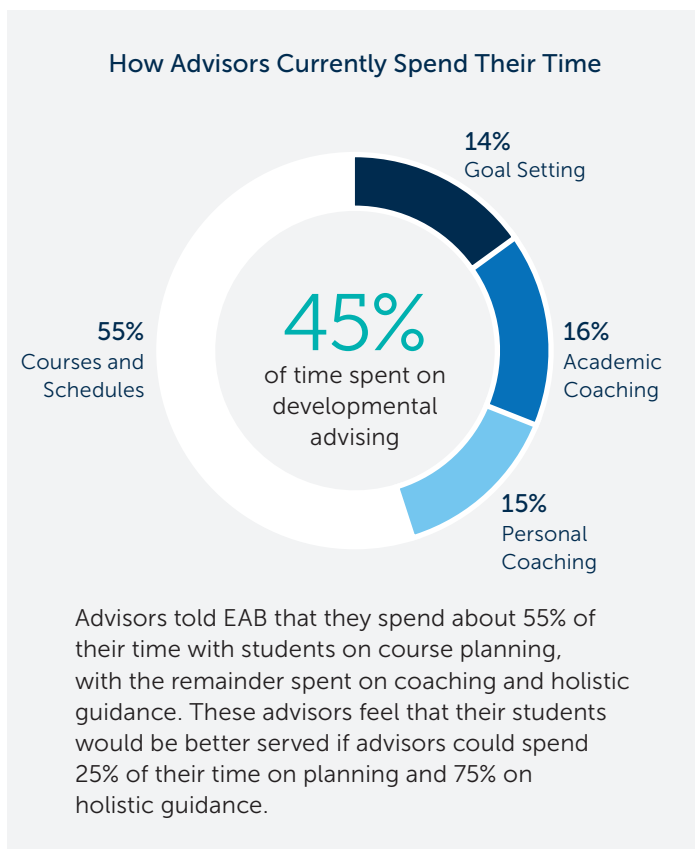
ROADMAP
coming soon

Simplify Early Academic Planning

Background

Students make a giant leap in complexity when they move from the relatively limited course selection available at their high school to the seemingly endless choice of courses and programs offered by their college. Colleges pride themselves on offering comprehensive curricula that foster academic exploration—indeed, this is one of the foundational principles of a liberal arts education.

Unfortunately, all these options may actually discourage students from persisting. Unfettered choice creates unhelpful complexity and introduces risk for students who are just starting their college careers and not yet confident in navigating their new environments. Without proper guidance, students can become discouraged by a lack of direction, fall victim to choice paralysis, and choose to leave school instead of persisting. Others make costly course-planning mistakes that extend graduation timelines and hinder completion.

Colleges have traditionally relied on academic advisors to provide the necessary guidance to overcome these challenges. Unfortunately, the wide range of available options means that advisors often end up manually creating individual degree plans for each of their students. These efforts do not scale well, and advisors report that they unnecessarily spend time on course planning that could be put to better use providing other kinds of student support.

Until now, attempts to scale academic planning have been limited to static guides that show students idealized course sequences that add up to an on-time degree in a program of choice. The expectation is that students can follow these degree plans with minimal guidance from their advisors. While useful in principle, static degree plans

How Advisors Currently Spend Their Time

14% Goal Setting

45% of time spent on developmental advising

55% Courses and Schedules

16% Academic Coaching

15% Personal Coaching

Advisors told EAB that they spend about 55% of their time with students on course planning, with the remainder spent on coaching and holistic guidance. These advisors feel that their students would be better served if advisors could spend 25% of their time on planning and 75% on holistic guidance.

lose power when applied to the large and increasing numbers of students who transfer credits from other schools or enroll part-time.

Degree plans also are of little use to undeclared students who don't yet have a sequence of major requirements that they can follow. Schools have a limited window of time to help these students find a direction and purpose before they start to wonder why they are in college at all.

Guidance

Meta-majors are one of the best ways to streamline academic planning, reduce the burden on advisors, provide correct direction, and encourage persistence for undeclared majors.

A meta-major is a prescribed multi-term course plan that encourages first-year and undeclared students to take classes that can be applied to all the related majors within a broader academic field. It provides students with a productive framework to constructively explore within a broad academic area of interest, offsetting feelings of aimlessness that might otherwise discourage undeclared students from returning.

Meta-majors also encourage strong credit momentum. By creating prefabricated course schedules, schools can default students into pathways that accrue 30 credits a year and ensure students attempt a minimum number of foundational courses in a general area of interest. Building this momentum early on minimizes loan burden while keeping students motivated to continue to graduation.

Meta-majors convey important planning and psychological benefits, but they also simply make course registration easier for students. Rather than having to face the full course catalog, students can simply pick from a limited number of pre-approved options that they know will set them up for early success. This makes registration more seamless for students and saves advisors lots of time that they can then devote to holistic student support.

Most schools develop between five to ten different meta-majors, each corresponding to a broad academic area. The most common areas of meta-majors are STEM, Humanities, Social Sciences, Business, Education, and Engineering. In addition, community or technical colleges often develop a small number of meta-majors to house their technical programs.

Building meta-majors rightly has a reputation for being a challenging and time-consuming process, but there are ways to make it easier. Meta-majors do not alter degree requirements and thus may not need to be driven by the faculty in the programs that they serve. Instead, the schools that have had the best results with meta-majors started by asking their advisors to design them. After the draft plans are created, they are taken to the academic departments for sign-off. Any inconsistencies in course offerings between related programs, such as different flavors of precalculus for various STEM majors, can be identified and resolved at that time.

PART 1

> Eliminating
Registration and
Financial Barriers

> **Supporting Students
with Technology-
Enabled Advising**

> Building Belonging
and Academic
Confidence

PART 2

> Reducing the Number
of Nonproductive
Credits

> Enhancing the
Value of the
Curriculum

Supporting Students with Technology-Enabled Advising

Professional advisors play an increasingly critical role in supporting student success. Advisors who were once asked primarily to serve as academic guides to help students choose courses and majors are now seeing their roles redefined to provide holistic support for a wide range of student concerns. We anticipate that their roles will further increase in importance as institutions rely more and more on advisors to play a direct role in driving reenrollment.

Businesses that rely on recurring revenue from clients usually have staff who are professionally responsible for renewing these accounts, often through proactive communication and case management. It is somewhat surprising that colleges and universities have not made similar investments in establishing roles tasked specifically with "renewing" students.

The closest analogs to client support on most campuses are professional advisors. It is already common for advisors to manage support for defined caseloads of students. In recent years, these advisors have been asked to be more proactive in managing these caseloads and are being given the technological tools to coordinate care with other student support units in order to resolve retention barriers.

Some of the most entrepreneurial advising offices have begun holding their advisors professionally accountable for interactions that drive retention, and some will go so far as to include the retention rate of the cohort as one of the accountability metrics.

College leaders are supporting advisors in these efforts by hiring additional staff to reduce caseload size, equipping these advisors with technology to enhance their effectiveness, and strengthening the connection of these advisors to other support offices on campus.

Proactively Manage Advising Caseloads

Background

Academic advising offices emerged in the 1990s and 2000s to supplement faculty advising by providing incoming and pre-major students with guidance on courses and programs. These offices were, and typically still are, staffed and organized with this primary purpose in mind.

From the earliest days, it became clear that providing incoming students with a dedicated point of contact improved their chances of avoiding or overcoming common challenges that might otherwise have led to dropping out. Schools seeking to capitalize on these relationships have gradually lowered advising ratios, assigned dedicated caseloads, installed mandatory advising requirements, and standardized the professional expectations for advisors.

Despite these advances, most advising offices remain fairly reactive in their approach to managing student needs. The onus is on students to seek out help when they need it. Unfortunately, this means that many addressable problems can fall through the cracks.

In recent years, the most effective advising offices have used technology to adopt a more proactive approach to seeking out and solving student challenges. This proactivity adds the final missing element needed to fully manage student "renewals" by reaching out to students who look like they are struggling or are showing indications that they might not return.

Can faculty advisors be effective caseload managers?

It can be a challenge to ask faculty to adopt proactive advising practices when advising isn't their full-time job, although exceptions are often found at smaller colleges and among highly motivated individuals. Additionally, many faculty advisors do not feel equipped or trained to manage the holistic student needs that emerge from proactive outreach. We encourage you to make an exhaustive list of the students' holistic advising needs, and then take this list to faculty advisors and ask them which of these needs they feel comfortable taking ownership over. The remaining needs on the list should then be assigned to a professional advisor using proactive caseload management, giving students two points of advising contact. These professional advisors often work closely with their faculty advising counterparts to provide collaborative support for their shared students.

Guidance

Advising offices that use a proactive caseload management approach often adopt caseloads of 300 or fewer with the expectation of each advisor managing the needs of his or her assigned students. The most effective models align caseload assignments to specific programs and majors, allowing the advisor to develop a trusted relationship with the corresponding academic units.

Advisors then use data and technology to run proactive communication campaigns managing their students' needs. The most basic campaigns focus on getting students to register for the upcoming term, while more sophisticated campaigns may target students with a broad range of outreach covering academic, financial, or social needs. Advising offices develop campaign calendars to coordinate efforts and stage them to appropriate times of the term.

Sophisticated advising offices manage caseloads by using analytics to subdivide cohorts into tiers based on need, allowing advisors to deploy their efforts in a more equitable and effective manner. Most students receive a common baseline level of support, with a smaller group of higher-need students getting additional contact points. A small group of the highest-need students are designated for intensive support and regular touchpoints every few weeks during the term.

As advisors become more proactive, they also have become more holistic. Proactive outreach inevitably surfaces student needs beyond simple registration and academic-planning issues. In response, some advising offices have begun recruiting and training advisors who can guide students on issues of academic performance, career planning, financial concerns, and other common issues in addition to guiding academic planning.

EAB has developed a needs-based advising model based on practices used in the health care industry. **Learn more about "Population Health Management" on page 24.**

Recommended Resources
Access source material, tools, and further reading on eab.com

Hardwiring Student Success
STUDY

A Student-Centered Approach to Advising
STUDY

Defining the Faculty Role in Student Success
STUDY

What Can Health Care Teach Us About Student Success?
WHITE PAPER

The Murky Middle
INFOGRAPHIC

Develop a Student-Centered Advising Model
ROADMAP
coming soon

Coordinate Student Support Networks

Background

Support offices such as financial aid, career advising, academic support, and the mental health center have a positive impact on student success but are often underutilized. Underutilization means that students are not getting the help they need and institutions are not getting the fullest return out of the investment they have made in those offices.

Much like with advising, colleges and universities often leave it up to the students to engage with these support offices on their own. This presupposes that students are aware that support is available, know when it is time to engage, and are not deterred by the stigma of seeking help.

One of the best ways to drive support utilization is through proactive referrals from advisors or faculty. Of all staff, faculty have the most regular engagement with students and are often the first to notice when a problem arises. Similarly, advisors may surface student issues during routine appointments or during proactive outreach campaigns.

Support referrals help advisors proactively manage their caseloads by adding capacity and depth of expertise around specific student needs. By linking offices, schools can create a "coordinated care network" that collaborates to ensure that students get their needs met. However, the efficiency and effectiveness of this network are often limited by the strength of communication between the support offices, undercutting the return that can be generated in retention and tuition revenue.

Guidance

Campuses should start by assessing their current referral processes. In many cases, referrals are handled informally by directing students to the office that can help. Often students are simply told about the support office by their advisor and then expected to self-refer. Passive, informal referrals undercut the effectiveness of the overall support network.

Schools that find inefficiencies in their referral process should consider adopting case management technology to create formal referrals between offices. Technology helps ensure that students connect with the receiving office and allows that office to share notes and collaborate with the referring staff member as needed.

Technology is also critical to engaging faculty in coordinated care. Academic early-alert systems allow faculty to quickly call attention to students exhibiting concerns, allowing advisors to intervene before the problem gets worse. Faculty participation goes up when they are given a clear explanation of the critical role they play in student care and are assisted by user-friendly systems, clear expectations of the process, and closed-loop reporting that lets them know the outcome of a referral when appropriate.

When building a coordinated care network, start by strengthening lines of communication between advisors and other campus stakeholders such as academic support and financial aid. These offices deal with the student needs that advisors most often encounter and add important capacity for managing issues that go beyond the typical professional scope of an advisor.

Support offices may need to adjust their processes in order to accommodate referrals, including working out how to incorporate case management technology. The most common solution is to ask support offices to adopt a version of the technologies already being used by advisors to manage their caseloads. Schools can do this effectively by first observing how the support office does its work, then suggesting features of the technology that can enhance or facilitate those specific processes. Doing so helps build buy-in for the technology that the support office might have initially thought was "just for advisors."

Navigate, EAB's student success management system, is used by colleges to support advising and coordinated care efforts. **Learn more about Navigate on page 25.**

Recommended Resources
Access source material, tools, and further reading on eab.com

Why a Coordinated Care Network May Be the Key to Improving Student Success

BLOG ➔

How to Bridge the Gaps in Your Early-Alert Program

INFOGRAPHIC ➔
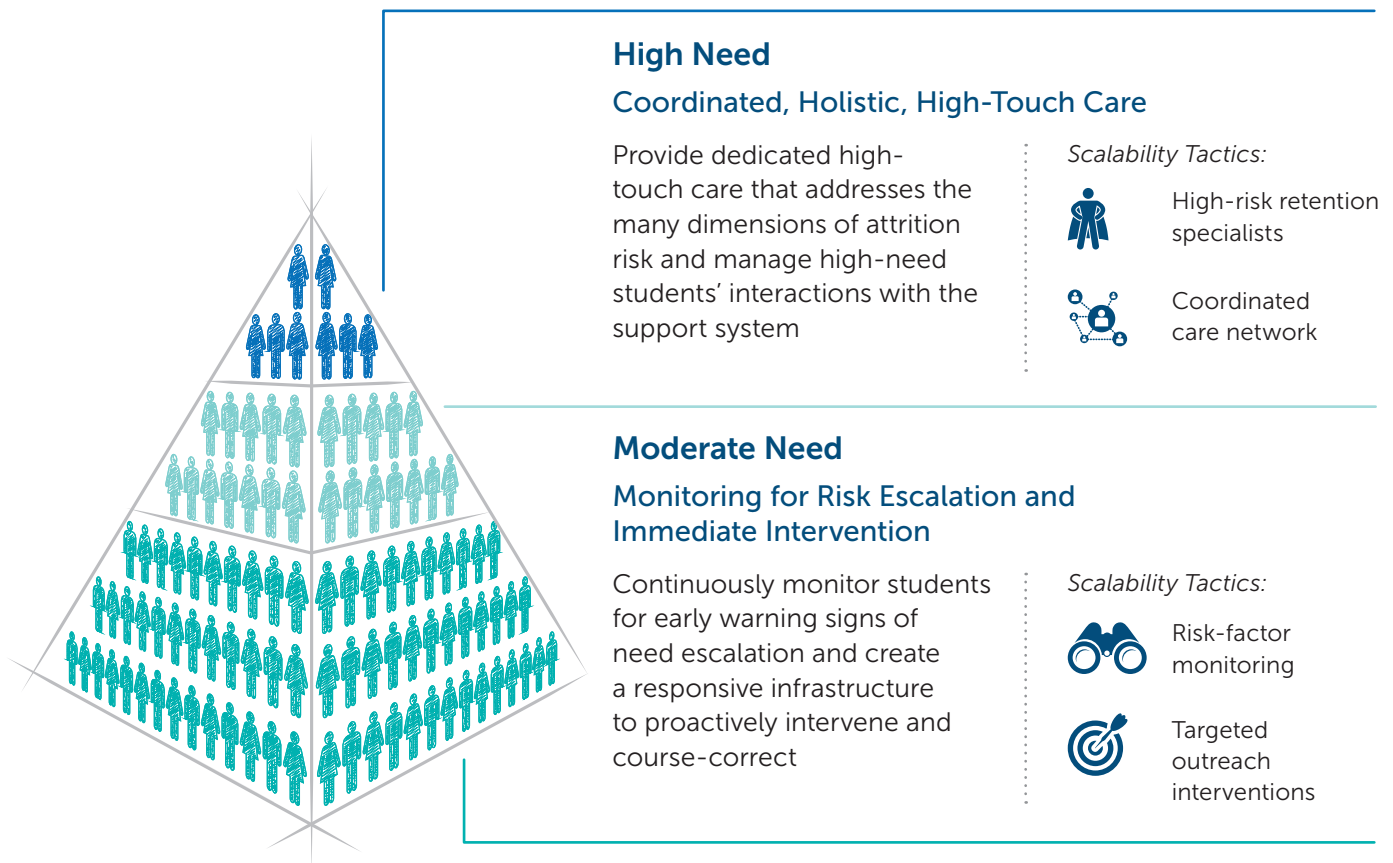
The New Blueprint for Student Success

Build a More Scalable, Effective Student Support Model with Population Health Management Principles

Colleges and universities are adding capacity to their advising and support offices, but many still struggle to provide all students with the support they need. Inspiration may come from the health care industry. A care model known as "population health management" stratifies patients by level of need, then uses people and technology to delivery efficient care to each segment. Could higher education do the same?

Below we lay out what a population health management approach to student success might look like, including strategies you can implement today to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of your student success efforts.

Building Blocks for Success

Create Differentiated Care Pathways to Match Different Student Needs

High Need
Coordinated, Holistic, High-Touch Care

Provide dedicated high-touch care that addresses the many dimensions of attrition risk and manage high-need students' interactions with the support system

Scalability Tactics:

High-risk retention specialists

Coordinated care network

Moderate Need
Monitoring for Risk Escalation and Immediate Intervention

Continuously monitor students for early warning signs of need escalation and create a responsive infrastructure to proactively intervene and course-correct

Scalability Tactics:

Risk-factor monitoring

Targeted outreach interventions

Low Need
Preventive Education and Enabled Self-Direction

Keep low-need students from encountering roadblocks through positive behavioral nudges, resources for effective self-advisement, and streamlined access to support services

Scalability Tactics:

Self-service portals

Automated behavioral nudges

EAB's Student Success Management System

A Student Success Management System is an enterprise-level technology that links administrators, advisors, deans, faculty, support staff, and students in a coordinated care network designed to help schools proactively manage student success and deliver a return on education.

Unlock the power of data analytics and bringing insight and student success management **intelligence** to administrators and leaders.

Create a connected and coordinated network of support for every student, enabling targeted intervention and proactive, **strategic care**.
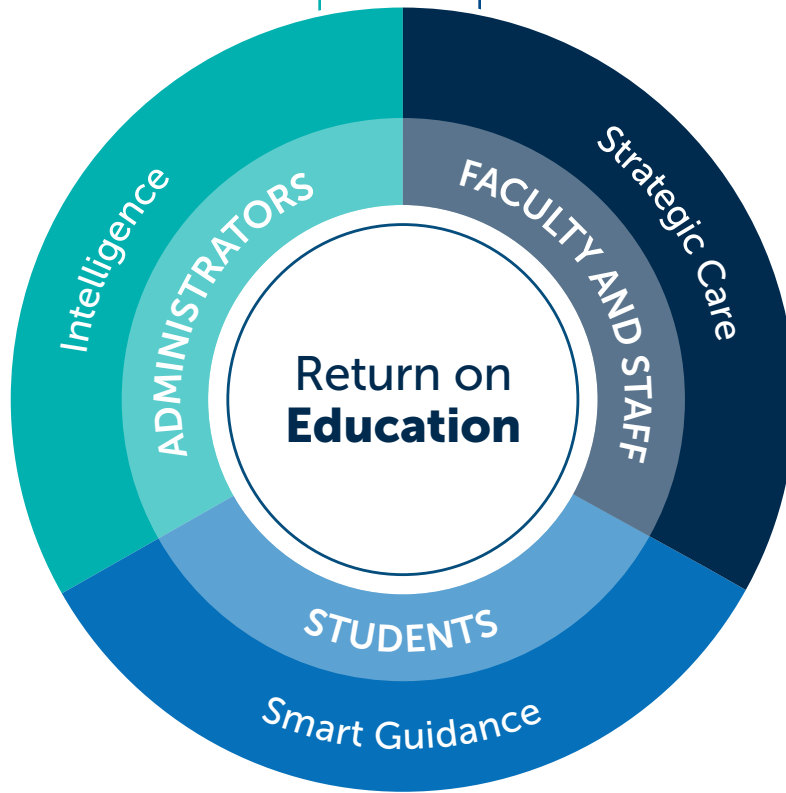
Provide curated, **intelligent guidance** at the most pivotal moments along the college journey, simplifying and structuring student pathways to completion.

Formalize Student Success Organization and Leadership

Background

Student success has long been treated as something that is "owned by everyone, owned by no one." Relatively few colleges and universities have created a stand-alone division specifically for retaining and graduating students. The most important student support units—advising, academic support, financial aid, and career services—are commonly spread broadly across academic affairs, student affairs, and enrollment management.

Distributed ownership makes it harder to argue for additional staff capacity and capabilities needed to provide baseline support for students. Without a dedicated student success budget, support offices and initiatives are funded piecemeal through whatever silos in which the individual components might be found.

The lack of common reporting lines also makes it harder to coordinate cases among these units. Sometimes these units may have independent goals and objectives that are not aligned or potentially even working at cross purposes.

The tradition of distributed ownership inhibits the creation of a single point of accountability in the form of a mid-level or senior-level administrator functioning as the institution's chief student success officer. Absent such a role, responsibility for a coherent institution-wide student success strategy often falls to the most senior executives at the schools, who are rarely able to give it full mindshare.

Schools have similarly been reluctant to build individual or unit performance goals linked to institutional student success objectives. Professional academic advisors who have assigned caseloads may represent one of the best opportunities to cascade institution-wide goals down to individual performance objectives, but few schools have taken this step. Many do not even offer advisors annual reviews, and those that do may not provide metrics related to the quality of student service.

Guidance

The concept of a dedicated student success vertical is still entering the mainstream. It will likely be several years before a consensus can be reached on the correct organizational and leadership structures. That said, EAB research has identified several trends that can be useful for understanding and participating in this movement.

First, we have seen a common bundle of student support units that are being gathered to create student success divisions. An EAB analysis of the organizational charts from over 100 partner institutions revealed that one-third had created a dedicated student success division headed up by an administrator with "retention" or "student success" in his or her title. Most commonly, these divisions include some combination of academic advising, academic support, and career services brought together to provide students with a coordinated continuum of care addressing multiple facets of student development.

Roughly 10% of EAB partner institutions have taken the additional step of elevating this student success division to the level of the cabinet, overseen by a vice president or vice provost. In these cases, the core bundle of student support units is commonly combined with admissions and financial aid to create a division responsible for supporting success across the full extent of the student lifecycle.

Second, we have seen schools working to create synergies between the support offices within their student success division. One of the main reasons to bundle together support is to encourage collaboration. One of the best ways to do this is via a technology-enabled "coordinated care network" such as that described in Recommendation 5.

Third, when student success divisions are created, their heads often use data to make the case for investment in additional staff members to provide better student support. Support units are often underfunded, and the assembly of a student success division creates an occasion to argue for new investment. There are two common methods for doing this:

▷ Calculate the gap between the number of touchpoints currently offered students and the number of touchpoints that would be needed to provide comprehensive care, and then translate this to the number of staff members needed to close this gap. For example, you may decide that students need two advising touchpoints per term. In that case, work backward from a 300:1 caseload ratio to determine how many additional advisors would be needed to provide that level of service.

▷ Calculate the retention impact that can be directly attributable to current staff, and then calculate the impact in terms of tuition revenue. If the ROI is positive, use this data to make the case that additional investment in staff will "pay for itself." This strategy depends on being able to plausibly argue that retention gains are the result of specific prior investments and thus may not be possible in all cases.

Finally, student success divisions are starting to take the lead on defining appropriate professional goals and accountability systems for student success staff. Advisor performance criteria should be based on factors that are within their control. You should not make advisors responsible for the overall retention rate of their institution, but you might consider evaluating them based on the persistence of their assigned cohorts. More commonly, advisors are tracked and held professionally accountable for advising activities, such as appointments made or early alerts resolved, that are known to roll up to institutional success goals.

Schools that track advisors on professional metrics must also offer incentives for hitting these goals. One option is to provide high-performing staff with paid professional development opportunities, such as attending national conferences. Other schools have created advising career ladders with different levels recognizing seniority and allowing for the promotion of top performers.

PART 1

> Eliminating Registration and Financial Barriers

> Supporting Students with Technology-Enabled Advising

> Building Belonging and Academic Confidence

PART 2

> Reducing the Number of Nonproductive Credits

> Enhancing the Value of the Curriculum

Building Belonging and Academic Confidence

Reforms to advising, academic planning, and administrative processes are a good first step toward addressing the root causes driving student attrition; however, these reforms alone won't be sufficient. Colleges and universities must do more up front to ensure that students believe they belong at their institution and can succeed there.

Students start college in different places academically and socially. Some come to school lacking confidence that they will succeed. This is especially true of students who have been underserved in prior educational experiences.

Institutions that are fully committed to equity and student support take measures to address systemic biases and create an environment committed to fostering inclusiveness and belongingness. Leaders who invest in initiatives and policy changes that address self-confidence, academic preparation, and sense of belonging will be the first to move the dial on equitable outcomes.

Enroll Students in Pre-college Academic Preparation Programs

Background

Some students come to college with the self-confidence needed to overcome early challenges. Others enter college with less confident mindsets and high degrees of uncertainty about whether they really belong. Left unaddressed, this lack of confidence can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Colleges have long invested in pre-college or summer bridge programs designed to help underprepared students get ready for their first term, often with a specific focus on easing the transition for historically underserved students. These programs emphasize academic and personal success and are often successful in helping students feel more confident and prepared for their college experience when classes start in the fall. Unfortunately, they also have some drawbacks.

Students often sense that their participation in these programs comes as a result of the college viewing them as a challenge or a problem to fix. Though they may gain knowledge and skills from the program, they may also feel stigmatized as a result of their participation. These negative feelings can be especially potent for underserved students such as first-generation students and students of color, and they can cause even high-achieving students to underperform their potential.

Often small in scope, summer programs also fail to reach all of the students who would benefit from transitional skill-building. For example, some students with excellent academic records may lack social confidence or an understanding of when or how to ask for help when needed. These challenges may not emerge on applications or standardized tests, but they can lead to first-year retention challenges and equity gaps.

Guidance

A handful of progressive colleges is endeavoring to overcome these drawbacks by expanding summer programs to include many more students, including students who have not been identified as underprepared. Expanding and rebranding these programs normalizes them, overcoming the stigmatization and encouraging engagement.

The best summer programs create low-stakes environments for students to adapt to college-level coursework and build confidence in their ability to succeed. They also create an early opportunity to build connections to peers and faculty.

Students in these programs get credits for college-level courses that fulfill general education requirements or foundational courses in their likely area of study. Doing so creates early momentum and helps students reach 30 earned credits before the beginning of their second year.

Summer programs also introduce students to the support services available on campus. Students are coached, often by peer mentors, on when and how to use these services, which in turn fosters help-seeking behavior when the main semester begins.

Measures can also be taken to reduce participation costs. Opportunity cost can be defrayed by compressing the program to just the week or two before the fall semester starts. Alternatively, students who enroll in programs that begin before July 1 can potentially take advantage of their prior year of Pell grant eligibility (with the acknowledgment that they may have less Pell money at the end of college).

Recommended Resources
Access source material, tools, and further reading on eab.com

Transforming the
First-Generation College
Student Experience

STUDY ➔

Build Academic
Confidence Through
Pre-college Programs

WHITE PAPER ➔
coming soon

Barriers to Student Success:
A Compendium of More Than
100 Equity Gaps

INFOGRAPHIC ➔

Student Equity
and Inclusion

ROADMAP ➔
coming soon

Foster Social Support and Personal Belongingness

Background

Many students enroll but still hold lingering doubts about their personal or social fitness for higher education. We know that these feelings are particularly true for first-generation students and those who are attending institutions with demographic makeups vastly different from their home communities. In response, institutions have created orientation programs, student activities, living-learning communities, and more programs to promote a sense of belonging and personal support. Many of these initiatives involve peer-to-peer support either in the form of formal mentoring or fostering informal connections between incoming and current students.

The quality and reach of these programs vary greatly, none more so than peer mentoring programs. Most are designed to be small and lack the scope to provide support to large numbers of incoming students. Many are poorly resourced and rely on unpaid and under-trained mentors. In these cases, the benefits of the program are largely dependent on the skill and dedication of individual mentors, which creates inconsistent experiences for program participants and fails to engage the mentors fully.

Guidance

The most robust and effective programs treat mentors as professional success coaches who are extensions of institutional student success initiatives. Students must apply to be mentors, are compensated for their time, and receive formal and ongoing training. The very best programs include measures of professional accountability to ensure mentors are meeting their commitments. The schools that have most successfully deployed peer mentors give nearly every student multiple opportunities for formal peer-to-peer support.

Well-run programs also serve to help retain the mentors themselves through career development, a sense of community, and tiered leadership opportunities.

Not all peer-based programs exclusively center on fostering social belongingness. Colleges and universities are also using peers as academic coaches and study group facilitators, particularly in gateway courses with high failure rates. National studies have found that students who attend these weekly peer-led sessions earn meaningfully better final grades and are more likely to be retained.

Peers are also used as extensions of the advising office and thus are linked into the Coordinated Care Network discussed in Recommendation 5. Peer advisors can function as frontline support to address basic student questions and offer help navigating confusing institutional systems. They also provide much-needed extra capacity for conducting proactive outreach to students not registered for the next term.

Recommended Resources
Access source material, tools, and further reading on eab.com

Peer-to-Peer
Support Toolkit

TOOLKIT ➲
coming soon

Assess Campus Climate and Prepare for Flashpoints

Background

More than ever before, today's generation of students makes choices about businesses and other organizations based on shared social values. They expect the institutions they choose to be socially aware and demonstrate ongoing progress in making systemic improvements, especially as they pertain to equity. Colleges and universities are seen as leaders in this space and thus are held to an even higher standard. Left unaddressed, equity blind spots not only can have profound negative consequences for campus climate and feelings of belongingness but also can erode student and public confidence in the institution.

Unfortunately, campus leaders are often unaware of the brewing climate or equity incidents on campus. Without intensive engagement and introspection from stakeholders, a campus leadership team may not be aware of where real or even perceived discrimination or inequality exists on campus. Additionally, even those campuses willing to address inequity on campus may not have the policies, processes, or infrastructure to respond quickly and connect individual events with the larger context of diversity, equity, and inclusion challenges.

Guidance

Student feedback is one of the most straightforward and best ways to understand strengths and weaknesses related to diversity and inclusion on campus. Anonymous surveys can reveal hard truths about the state of equity and the climate on campus, motivate leaders to take action, and provide a blueprint for change.

Colleges and universities should take an important first step in the right direction through cultural competency training aimed at mitigating unaddressed biases among faculty and administrators. Exploring inherent biases can be an emotional and psychologically weighty undertaking. Fortunately, third-party organizations, such as the Center for Race and Equity at the University of Southern California, exist to guide college and university leadership teams through the process of self-examination.

Leaders must also prepare in advance for managing climate-related incidents or events that cause disturbances in the community or media, including heightened levels of activism, media and public scrutiny, and reputational damage. Unfortunately, climate flashpoints are the new normal, as all types of colleges and universities grapple with a wide range of incidents on campus.

Effectively managing climate flashpoints is a campus-wide priority that requires advance discussion and planning among senior leaders. While student affairs, campus safety, and/or public relations may take the lead in responding to a particular incident, it is critical that all senior institutional leaders have a baseline understanding of the current flashpoint landscape. Effectively addressing climate flashpoints is an institution-wide challenge that requires thoughtful preparation and discussion long before an incident ever takes place.

Prepared institutions include flashpoints as part of their overall risk-planning efforts, with distinct response teams and plans for different kinds of flashpoints. When a flashpoint does occur, prepared institutions are able not only to address the issue at hand but also to have preestablished processes and structures for addressing the broader campus context that predicated it.

Recommended Resources
Access source material, tools, and further reading on eab.com

Addressing
Campus Climate
Flashpoints

WHITE PAPER ➔

Manage
Campus Climate
Flashpoints

ROADMAP ➔
coming soon

As consumers, students need to know that they are getting value for investing their time and money in a college education. "Is college worth it?" isn't just a question that students ask before they apply to college. Current students need to be continuously resold on the value proposition of their education, especially when the going gets rough and they are considering leaving.

Study after study shows that a college degree has historically been one of the best financial investments a person can make in himself or herself. Americans with college degrees make more money across their lifetimes and are more resilient to negative changes in economic conditions. Forward-looking enrollment projections point to even stronger demand for college degree holders in the future.

And yet, students rightfully have questions about the value proposition of college. College is expensive, and today's students are being asked to take on more debt than ever before. Graduates take out nearly $30,000 in loans on average. There is a severe downside risk, as students who leave without completing still have an average of $10,000 in debt and do not enjoy the boost in extra earning potential that would have come with a degree.

This debt is a meaningful trade-off on the future. Recent graduates report that their debt is forcing them to delay buying homes, getting married, having children, and going to graduate school. Debt also carries the downside risk of default and subsequent impact on future ability to borrow. This is an equity issue as default rates are highest among students from underserved backgrounds.

Debt can be a motivating factor for current students as well, especially in an era when alternatives such as apprenticeships or coding bootcamps market themselves as more cost-effective paths to a middle-class income.

If college were a business, that business would be addressing these customer challenges by doing more to enhance the value of its product. At EAB, we have described this as enhancing the "Return on Education" (ROE). To increase ROE, colleges must graduate more students, at lower cost, with better postgraduate outcomes. Part I of this report focused on the first part of this equation, student retention. In Part II, we explore how colleges can further enhance their ROE by putting a special focus on the value that students are getting from their college experience, minimizing hidden cost, and increasing postgraduate employability and lifelong learning.

Part 2

PART 1

> Eliminating Registration and Financial Barriers

> Supporting Students with Technology-Enabled Advising

> Building Belonging and Academic Confidence

PART 2

Reducing the Number of Nonproductive Credits

> Enhancing the Value of the Curriculum

Reducing the Number of Nonproductive Credits

College is expensive and is getting more so each year. Meaningfully reducing the cost of college is likely to require legislative solutions in the form of free college programs or reinvestment in public subsidies for state colleges and universities. It is impossible to say with certainty when or if these needed reforms will come to pass.

In the meantime, there are measures that colleges and universities can take to reduce the cost burden for individual students. Notably, they can work to reduce so-called "nonproductive credits"—courses that students pay for but which ultimately do not contribute to a finished degree due to a failing grade or non-applicability to program requirements.

If college is a business, then college degrees can be thought of as the product that students are buying. Nonproductive credits are defective parts that extend time to degree and thereby add to the total cost of ownership. The added cost can be significant, depending on the path a student takes.

There are two big things schools can do to reduce the number of nonproductive credits. First, they can help more students pass the classes they take. Recent advances in instructional design and teaching techniques can increase pass rates, and institutions should do all they can to help faculty redesign classes to integrate these innovations.

Second, and perhaps less obvious, schools must also minimize the number of courses students take that don't fulfill program requirements. The biggest culprits for most campuses are noncredit developmental courses, non-articulated transfer credits, and excess electives that result from poor degree planning. These courses represent "hidden costs" that make college unnecessarily more expensive, driving up overall costs and reducing student value.

Redesign High-DFW Milestone Courses

Background

When a student fails or withdraws from a class (commonly called a "DFW"), he or she ends up paying for credits he or she did not receive. The course will need to be repeated, effectively adding to the total cost of a college experience. Most students assume they will pass the classes they take, so this additional expense can rightly be thought of as a hidden cost of college.

Progressive institutions are looking to control these hidden costs. There are plenty of reasons for DFW that are outside of institutional control, such as a lack of student effort or an unexpected life circumstance. That should not prevent you from exploring changes to courses that seem to produce DFW at unexpectedly high rates.

Getting a failing grade is not the only reason to redesign an introductory class. EAB data analyses regularly find that *C* grades in some introductory courses are closely linked to lower pass rates in subsequent related classes and lower overall success rates in the relevant major. Building a solid foundation in these "predictive courses" is critical to future success.

Many leaders are reluctant to take on course redesign for fear of pushback from the faculty, who may feel that the institution is trying to water down the curriculum or imposing on academic freedom. These barriers can be overcome through proper communication and objective examination of the data.

Course redesign is increasingly recognized as an equity issue. Performance in early courses can signal future success for many students. Too often, these courses rely on passive, lecture-heavy teaching methods and norm-referenced grading practices. Early demographic disparities emerge in these courses, partially due to gaps in academic self-confidence, preparation, and feelings of belonging caused by these instructional practices. Course redesigns that emphasize active, collaborative learning in an inclusive classroom improve student learning for all while closing disparities.

Guidance

Many high-DFW courses can benefit by incorporating recent advances in instructional techniques and the maturation of hybrid, online, and flipped classroom modalities. Some colleges and universities have teaching and learning centers that can provide professional development to faculty looking to learn about the latest teaching innovations. These centers should be engaged in redesigned efforts whenever possible.

Course redesign takes considerable effort, and thus you may not want to take on too many at once. We recommend maximizing your impact by starting with courses that have both high DFW rates and high enrollments. These are most often general education and introductory courses. Institutions often find that they can make great progress against their DFW goals by focusing on fewer than a dozen classes.

Faculty own their program curricula and therefore they must be the ones to lead course redesign initiatives. Administrators can facilitate the process by providing course outcome data in a nonjudgmental manner. Take care to frame this as an "informational" conversation and avoid the perception that this data is meant to be punitive. Surprisingly, many faculty members have never seen the aggregated pass-rate data for their own courses. The most productive conversations start when administrators simply share the data with the faculty and then ask them what they think and what they want to do about it.

Faculty will need to be supported during the redesign, which can take a semester or more to complete. Institutions often help their faculty and incentivize them to take on the challenge by providing course release time or small grants.

Course redesign is not the only option for increasing pass rates. Faculty may decide not to redesign the class and instead work to improve pass rates via supplemental instruction. Supplemental instruction can take many forms but most often is provided in a small-group format on a weekly basis, facilitated by a student peer or teaching assistant.

Recommended Resources
Access source material, tools, and further reading on eab.com

The Course
Completion
Playbook

TOOLKIT ➔

Facilitate
Student-Centered
Course Redesign

ROADMAP ➔
coming soon

Streamline Prerequisite and Program Requirement Pathways

Background

Students who pass all their classes can still end up paying preventable "hidden costs" if they take more courses than expected. There are four main reasons why this happens.

First, some programs may require students to take more than the standard 60 credits for an associate degree or 120 credits for a bachelor's degree. Even if students are aware of this and plan ahead, these differences in program length raise questions about what is fair to expect students to complete for a degree.

Second, students may take classes they don't need. Any class a student takes should advance him or her closer to graduation as either a major requirement, general education course, or elective. Students who receive poor or insufficient guidance run the risk of taking courses that don't ultimately satisfy one of these requirements. Excessive major switches can also lead to non-applicable credits, especially for two-year students who don't have the same cushion

of exploratory electives enjoyed by students at four-year institutions.

Third, students may be forced to take noncredit developmental education courses. Developmental courses are not considered college-level and usually do not confer credits that apply to a degree. Thus, students who are placed into a developmental sequence will have to take a more expensive path to degree than those students who are placed into college-level courses from the start. This imbalance seems particularly egregious when one considers that students in developmental course sequences are often from low-income backgrounds.

Fourth and finally, students who transfer often are unable to articulate all of their previously earned credits at their new institution. By some measures, transfer students from two-year schools to four-year schools lose 40% of their previously earned credits. This problem bridges across institutions and thus might be the least likely to receive attention on your campus.

Guidance

Higher education is responding to these inefficiencies through the Guided Pathways movement. Several years into the movement, there is still not widespread consensus around the right ways to do guided pathways, which has stalled efforts on many campuses. We can, however, point to some principles that seem to have achieved widespread agreement. Use these principles when evaluating your program pathways.

First, faculty must review programs and limit credit requirements to 60 credits for an associate degree and 120 credits for a bachelor's degree. Unfortunately, this is a problem that often requires top-down leadership from a president or provost to set mandatory limits for all programs on campus, except in cases of absolute pedagogical necessity, such as for accreditation purposes.

Second, leadership should mandate the creation of structured degree plans for every program. We noted in Recommendation 2 that static degree plans lose some of their power when applied to real student pathways, so they are not a panacea. That said, the exercise of producing a degree plan creates an occasion for faculty to review the sequencing and pacing of program requirements, which in turn can reveal hidden inefficiencies that they should address.

Third, noncredit developmental sequences should be replaced with college-level coursework supplemented with corequisite workshops. Institutions and states that have moved away from traditional developmental sequences have repeatedly shown better course outcomes and higher retention rates. This is particularly true of students who previously would have been placed in a developmental algebra-to-calculus sequence and are instead placed into a college-level statistics or quantitative reasoning course.

Some schools have taken this a step further to replace all calculus-based math requirements with statistics or quantitative reasoning, except in programs that explicitly require calculus, such as STEM. Too many students struggle to complete the calculus sequence, despite having little practical use for calculus in their field of study or postgraduate life. Statistics courses are more broadly applicable and have higher completion rates.

Fourth, consider working with your transfer partners to develop cross-institution pathways that help ensure students preserve credits. Most transfer pathways function like degree maps that help a student start at a two-year school and finish at a four-year school while staying in the same major. You may find that changes will be needed in some courses in order to reach an agreement on articulation.

Recommended Resources
Access source material, tools, and further reading on eab.com

| Promoting Timely Degree Completion | Achieving Pathways Goals with Student-Centered Design | Reengineering Developmental Math | Achieving Pathways Goals with Student-Centered Design | Design Student-Centered Guided Pathways to Achieve Strategic Goals |
| STUDY → | STUDY → | STUDY → | TOOLKIT → | ROADMAP → *coming soon* |

Encourage Pedagogical Development of Instructors

Background

Teaching quality and faculty engagement play an enormous role in the long-term value that students get from college. Academic researchers have also found that formal and informal faculty-student contact is a strong predictor of persistence. Yet, the lecture-driven teaching methods of higher education's past will not suffice on their own to advance student success goals, eliminate demographic disparities, or prepare students for an increasingly complex workplace after graduation.

Innovations in teaching and learning have proliferated in recent years as faculty members have tested techniques from flipped classrooms and videoconferencing to team-taught interdisciplinary courses. Unfortunately, too few faculty members have the training and support needed to design highly effective, evidence-based courses from the start. Few graduate programs dedicate extensive time to instructional excellence, and the current tenure and promotion process on most campuses rewards research over teaching.

Pioneering faculty innovators often operate in isolation, out of view of administrators and even their own colleagues. This knowledge gap hampers the spread of high-impact techniques. When academic leaders are not familiar with faculty innovators, they miss opportunities to leverage the best teaching strategies for the courses that could benefit most, such as courses with high DFW rates.

It is often overly difficult for faculty to engage with learning innovations. Existing faculty development activities reach too few faculty members and do not have the standing on campus to transform the teaching and learning environment at most colleges and universities. If academic leaders fail to invest in instructional development across the faculty lifecycle, they will forgo improving one of the important contributing factors to student success and equity.

Guidance

Institutions should set expectations for teaching excellence and innovation from faculty members' first day on campus. Front-loading course design support and instructional development can help new faculty consider and adopt best practices before they become immersed in myriad other responsibilities. A simple one-day orientation to teaching policies and culture will not suffice; institutions need intensive course-design institutes that create faculty learning communities around instructional innovation. These programs should allow faculty to either design new courses or modify a syllabus for an existing course. They should incorporate emphases on active learning, rigorous assessment, and student equity.

Up-front course design support can help build a culture of teaching excellence, but it will not ensure continuous improvement of instruction. Instructors need exposure to ongoing pedagogical development. This may come in the form of access to centrally funded grants for course redesign, spaces for faculty to experiment with new techniques in low-stakes environments, or rigorous pilot programs that guide greater investment.

Those faculty members who do improve their courses and their instruction should receive recognition for their contributions to student success and equity. Faculty members should be encouraged to recognize and reward their colleagues with public awards, grants for further experimentation, and promotion and tenure. Some institutions have begun to emphasize the scholarship of teaching and learning in the promotion process to combine an emphasis on rigorous research with improvement in teaching and learning. Without ongoing scholarship on teaching, institutions may stagnate in their experimentation with new teaching methods and fail to engage those faculty members who want to dedicate their work to researching pedagogical effectiveness.

Recommended Resources
Access source material, tools, and further reading on eab.com

Scaling
Learning
Innovations

STUDY ➡

Promote Data-Informed
Teaching Through the Scholarship
of Teaching and Learning

WHITE PAPER ➡
coming soon

PART 1

> Eliminating Registration and Financial Barriers

> Supporting Students with Technology-Enabled Advising

> Building Belonging and Academic Confidence

PART 2

> Reducing the Number of Nonproductive Credits

> Enhancing the Value of the Curriculum

Enhancing the Value of the Curriculum

Students pay for a college education in order to be intellectually enriched and to prepare for a career after graduation. Honoring the student as a consumer—and for the commitment he or she is making to get a degree—requires colleges to do everything they can to maximize the value students get in return.

This starts in the classroom. Faculty take pride in their courses, but many could enhance their course offerings by incorporating recent pedagogical and technological advances that increase student learning. Colleges can facilitate this by expanding professional development opportunities for faculty instructors.

Of particular urgency are pedagogical techniques that better prepare students for their first jobs out of college. A 2014 analysis done by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York revealed that underemployment has gradually risen over the past decade or so for recent college graduates between the ages of 22 and 27. These numbers look even worse for graduates of color, especially when considering graduates of color take on more debt and pay it off more slowly than their white counterparts.

The key to maximizing postgraduate career outcomes is college experience that combines both technical skills and a liberal education focused on soft skill development—allowing technical graduates to develop the leadership skills they need to advance in their careers, while ensuring that liberal arts graduates have the basic technical skills necessary to compete for high-quality entry-level positions immediately after graduation.

Fortunately, much of what colleges are already doing falls into the fertile common ground between professional and intellectual development. This includes things such as active experiential learning, restructured general education, global and community engagement, and undergraduate research. Expanding these activities to more students, especially low-income and underserved students, will improve retention, completion, and postgraduation outcomes.

Recommendation 13

Embed Experiential
Learning in the Curriculum

Background

As students, parents, policy makers, and the public at large demand more career preparation from colleges and universities, the pressure to expand high-impact practices in and out of the classroom will only grow.

Employers want students with prior experience and an ability to articulate the skills they have learned. In many studies, more than 90% of employers say so-called "soft skills" such as critical thinking, leadership, and communication outweigh technical skills in their hiring processes. However, nearly the same proportion of executives claims they cannot find candidates with those skills.

Less than 40% of students believe they will graduate with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the workplace. The 2019 Gallup-Strada Survey identified six high-impact career development practices and found that only 17% of college graduates claim they had experienced at least four of those practices.

Internships are among the most common and most effective experiential learning opportunities, and employers are putting a priority on hiring graduates who have participated in internships or co-op programs. Unfortunately, financial barriers, limited institutional offerings, and a lack of awareness can prevent students, especially low-income and other underserved students, from participating. Failure to participate in these experiences is an important contributing factor not only to student stop-out but also to deficits in preparation for life after graduation.

Adding to the urgency to scale experiential learning, students from lower socioeconomic brackets are more likely to cite a concern about career outcomes as a primary consideration for continuing (or discontinuing) a college education. Considering the significant racial wealth gaps and declining social mobility, participation in high-impact practices must rise.

Institutions that have been the most successful with experiential learning still struggle to guarantee an opportunity for every student. Those with formal internship requirements often worry that a dearth of internships could impact graduation time. Institutions located in rural areas often face a lack of employers in the area capable of hosting their students.

Even with adequate employer capacity, many populations of students are unable to avail themselves of existing experiential learning. Students who face resource constraints often cannot take time away from a job to participate in an unpaid professional development experience, or they may have difficulty finding a placement due to a lack of the same type of professional network from which their wealthier peers often benefit.

Guidance

Rather than relying exclusively on internships, some institutions are now embedding experiential learning directly into course curricula, encouraging ongoing reflection on the career-ready skills and knowledge they have learned within their individual classes. Doing so provides equal opportunity for all students to participate while drawing a closer connection between their coursework and their future workplace needs.

Some faculty members may fear that bringing experiential learning into the classroom will threaten traditional disciplines such as the liberal arts, but this need not be the case. For example, a seamless but often overlooked way to engage students with experiential learning is to simply use course syllabi to list the skills and competencies that students will gain corresponding to each assignment. This easy change can help students connect even small pieces of a course to their long-term goals. Some institutions have gone beyond this passive though effective approach by encouraging regular reflection across the student experience by giving students tools such as e-portfolios and career-aligned capstones.

Some faculty may want to go further and embed experiential learning into their courses. Institutions can encourage this by offering proactive professional development support to faculty. The most effective experiential learning training and development programs follow a cohort-based "faculty fellowship" model, including both grant funding and instructional design support, and leverage respected and experienced faculty members as mentors.

Experiential learning courses often include projects that give students direct experience with employers, such as small consulting engagements or research projects. Career services staff can be invaluable partners for these courses by using their industry connections to help faculty source appropriate and meaningful projects from local employers.

To create the expectation that academic departments develop experiential learning opportunities, academic leaders should annually track student participation in high-impact practices by major. For many departments, this type of learning may be new, so the metric should not be used to allocate funding or otherwise create a negative incentive. However, the data on participation by department, and ideally by student demographic, will help guide investment for those departments that need additional support to achieve equity and student success goals.

Recommended Resources
Access source material, tools, and further reading on eab.com

Integrating Academic and Career Development

STUDY ➔

Reclaiming the Value of the Liberal Arts for the 21st Century

STUDY ➔

Integrating Academic and Career Development Toolkit

TOOLKIT ➔

Academic Vital Signs

DIAGNOSTIC ➔

Scale Experiential Learning and Career Development to Prepare Students for Postgraduation Success

ROADMAP ➔
coming soon

Sequence Career Guidance and Exploration in Parallel to Courses

Background

Student success leaders regularly lament that it is only students nearing graduation who pursue career services or career-relevant opportunities. These concerns are justified. Many students do not think about potential employers until they are preparing to graduate. Even then, only about half of all seniors at four-year institutions actually use the career services office, according to the National Survey of Student Engagement, and fewer than half of all seniors say they often or very often speak with a faculty member about career options.

Without earlier postgraduation planning and intentional academic and career development alignment, students struggle to demonstrate the skills and knowledge they could contribute to potential employers. This lack of planning and reflection is often at the heart of employers' complaints that students are not job-ready upon graduation.

Though experiential learning in individual courses can help students gain the skills and knowledge they need for postgraduation success, students also need to build a coherent narrative about their undergraduate experience to make a compelling pitch to potential employers. Too many institutions' general education requirements resemble an à la carte menu rather than a well-planned, integrated experience. Students choose courses that fill slots on a degree audit without understanding how they fit together. Moreover, faculty and academic leaders themselves rarely consider how students should articulate the totality of their learning journey across four or six years.

Guidance

Joint academic and career planning should begin as soon as students arrive on campus. Though many institutions have built degree maps that show students a desired sequence of required courses, few have integrated experiential learning and cocurricular engagement into the maps. Leading institutions provide students with guides that align academic, experiential, and cocurricular learning opportunities across each year of the student's time at the institution. Every undergraduate degree program should have one of these maps to help recruit and support students. They are especially beneficial to students who may be less familiar with navigating the college environment due to their first-generation status or lack of a declared major.

Experiential major maps can help students plan and connect their academic and cocurricular experiences, but institutional leaders can make this even more effective by creating more intentional course pathways within the core curriculum. Clusters of courses and aligned experiential components focused on social problems or career-relevant themes can help students articulate how their academic experience aligns with employer needs.

This sequenced career development will reach only some of the most well-resourced students if institutions do not proactively support first-generation and underserved students. Many of these students lack the financial wherewithal and the social networks to access experiences such as study abroad, unpaid internships, or undergraduate research. The most successful programs supporting these students integrate academic, personal, and career support across a student's entire time on campus. Additionally, these programs typically offer pre-made professional networks as well as predictable financial support. Without this holistic approach, institutions will not help all of their students have equal chances at success after graduation.

Recommended Resources
Access source material, tools, and further reading on eab.com

The Experiential Major
Maps Workbook

TOOLKIT ➔

How to Build
an Experiential
Major Map

INFOGRAPHIC ➔

Coda

CODA
Antifragility and Student Success

Recently, investor-turned-philosopher Nassim Taleb coined the term "antifragile" to describe systems that get stronger when stressed. Unlike fragile systems that break or robust systems that remain unchanged, antifragile systems actually improve when faced with challenges.

A good example of antifragility is your immune system. Exposure to infection produces antibodies that make it less likely you will suffer from that same infection in the future. Many industries are antifragile, where the stress of competition produces stronger organizations. Trial-and-error experimentation is yet another kind of antifragility. Each failed trial produces learning that ultimately leads to a stronger outcome. Antifragile systems can be found all around us, once you know how to look for them.

We believe that higher education is an antifragile system.

Colleges and universities serve many functions, but among the most important is to produce educated citizens to support the knowledge economy, social mobility, and an informed society.

Preventable student attrition represents inefficiency and weakness in this system.

The enrollment contraction forecasted for the 2020s seems likely to introduce disorder and financial uncertainty to higher education. Many schools will struggle to make their classes, and budgets will shrink. Some schools will be forced to scale back on their missions, and others might even close.

Well-run colleges and universities will respond to the challenge by adopting policies and practices such as those recommended here with the goal of retaining more of the students that they will fight harder to attract in the first place. The result, almost a side effect, will be that graduation rates go up. The system of degree production will get stronger.

Higher education faces headwinds, but we believe that our antifragility gives us a reason for hope. Confronted with the challenge, college administrators will quickly learn the leadership and management skills needed to make difficult but necessary improvements that are long overdue. Our institutions will get stronger, and our students and society will be the beneficiaries.
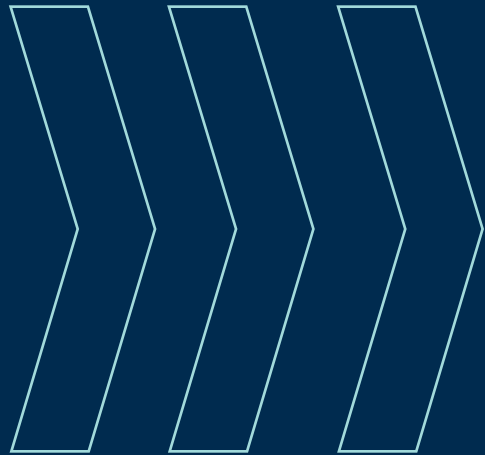
▶ For more on Student Success
visit **eab.com/studentsuccess**

Project Directors

Ed Venit, PhD
David Bevevino

Designer

Joy Drakes

Special Thanks:

This report is drawn from a decade of work advancing college and university student success efforts. We offer special thanks to the countless EAB researchers, consultants, technologists, and external advisors who have contributed to these efforts.