

2023

# DRIVING

---

## TOWARD A DEGREE

AWARENESS, BELONGING,  
AND COORDINATION



# OUR PARTNERS

## ANCHOR PARTNER



## RESEARCH PARTNERS



## STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE:

This report and its findings were made possible with the support of our partners. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of Tyton Partners and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of our partners. The intellectual property contained within this report belongs to Tyton Partners. The raw data from this study is not available to anyone outside of Tyton Partners.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	4
AWARENESS: ENGAGEMENT WITH ADVISING LIMITED BY CASELOAD.....	6
BELONGING IS SUPPORTED BY HOLISTIC ADVISING.....	13
COORDINATION IS VITAL TO HOLISTIC ADVISING.....	17
AN EMERGING CONCERN: ADVISOR RETENTION .....	22
IMPLICATIONS.....	25
SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS.....	26
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	29
ABOUT TYTON PARTNERS .....	30

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Higher education has come to recognize the equal importance of equity and excellence. The 2023 Boyer Report<sup>1</sup> highlights that to provide high-quality education, we must also prioritize equity. Ignoring equity perpetuates privilege, and access without excellence does not lead to desired student outcomes such as credential completion or career success.

Tyton Partners' Driving Toward a Degree (D2D) study keeps the equity-excellence imperative in mind and focuses on how institutions and technology providers can enhance student support services for everyone, and those from underserved racial/ethnic groups and with financial needs in particular. D2D has been monitoring academic advising and student supports in higher education for over six years. This year, we prioritized the student experience by surveying students to identify the crucial differences in their experiences and support preferences compared to institutional stakeholders. By measuring these differences, we uncovered opportunities for institutions and their partners to help make student support services more effective.

We conducted two large-scale surveys in Spring 2023, gathering insights from 2,048 students and 1,756 institutional stakeholders, 64% of whom were frontline advisors and non-academic support providers. From this research, we break down the key barriers to improving student support services into four primary areas (see *Figure 1*):

1. **Awareness:** Institutional respondents emphasize that low student engagement with advising resources is the main obstacle to improving advising for underserved racial/ethnic groups and students with financial needs. However, less than two-thirds of student survey respondents identified academic advising, career advising, or academic registration as available student support services, whereas close to all surveyed institutions said these services were available to students. **To address this disconnect, institutions should improve communication and active programming around available student support services – current practices of posting on campus websites, relaying during new student orientation, and providing course syllabus notes are too passive.**
  - a. In addition to actively reminding students of the supports available, mandatory advising is another way to increase awareness of academic advising. However, while 48% of surveyed institutions implement mandatory advising at scale, they are, at most, meeting with 85% of students in their caseloads. In fact, as caseloads increase, advisors are able to meet with less of their caseload. High caseloads significantly limit the true impact of effective policies such as mandatory advising, proactive efforts to reach out to struggling students, and sustained advising.
  - b. Finally, while awareness is a necessary condition for the utilization of academic advising, it is insufficient. Students need to feel their advising sessions will cover topics relevant to their challenges; for example, students want to discuss their financial challenges, while advisors think this is out-of-scope for their meetings, citing separate financial aid offices being more qualified to provide advise on aid.

---

1. The Boyer 2030 Commission, The Association for Undergraduate Education at Research Universities (UERU). (2022). *The Equity-Excellence Imperative, a 2030 Blueprint for Undergraduate Education at U.S. Research Universities*.

- 2. Belonging:** Alarming, only about 60% of students know about the full range of mental health, financial aid, and career services offered at their institutions. Students aware of more of these non-academic support services express a stronger sense of belonging at their institutions. **Increasing awareness of all student support services can enhance students' sense of belonging and improve student outcomes.**
- a. Our work finds that students who are aware of financial aid services at their institution identify it as important to their retention decisions. We also observe that students who perceive that their institution cares about their health and well-being also report higher levels of belonging.
  - b. There is a desire for students to interact with advisors whom students feel represent their lived experiences. The practice of representative diversity in student support providers is often not implemented at institutions.
- 3. Coordination:** Academic advising, mental health counseling, financial aid services, and career counseling often lack physical or digital integration and efficient referral systems. This lack of coordination hinders the practice of holistic advising in institutions. **While integration technologies have been adopted to some extent to support better information flows and communication about students, they have a low Net Promoter Score (-35), indicating the need for improving user experience and return on investment on these solutions.**
- 4. Turnover:** Retention of skilled advisors is an emerging challenge, especially at large four-year public institutions where caseloads are higher. Academic advisors are less likely to stay in their roles for the next five years if they have caseloads exceeding 300 students. To address this issue, institutions could enhance retention rates by clearly defining career paths for advisors that offer salary increases based on education, experience, and certifications.

Figure 1:

## Top barriers to improving advising, by subpopulation

ALL STUDENTS	STUDENTS FROM UNDERSERVED RACIAL GROUPS	STUDENTS WITH FINANCIAL NEED
Caseloads for advisors are too high (47%)	Low student engagement with advising resources (43%)	Low student engagement with advising resources (39%)
Low student engagement with advising resources (35%)	Limited understanding of students' needs (35%)	Limited understanding of students' needs (34%)
Lack of coordination across departments (30%)	Caseloads for advisors are too high (35%)	Caseloads for advisors are too high (33%)
Retention of advisors/turnover (28%)	Lack of coordination across departments (28%)	Lack of coordination across departments (30%)
Advisors are too overburdened with administrative tasks (26%)	Advisors are too overburdened with administrative tasks (24%)	Limited budget (25%)
Ineffective onboarding of faculty as advisors (24%)	Limited budget (21%)	Advisors are too overburdened with administrative tasks (25%)
Limited budget (23%)	Uncertainty about how to best reach students (21%)	Ineffective onboarding of faculty as advisors (24%)

Note: Survey question: "What are the top barriers to advising students?" Administrator/advisor/faculty n=1,756

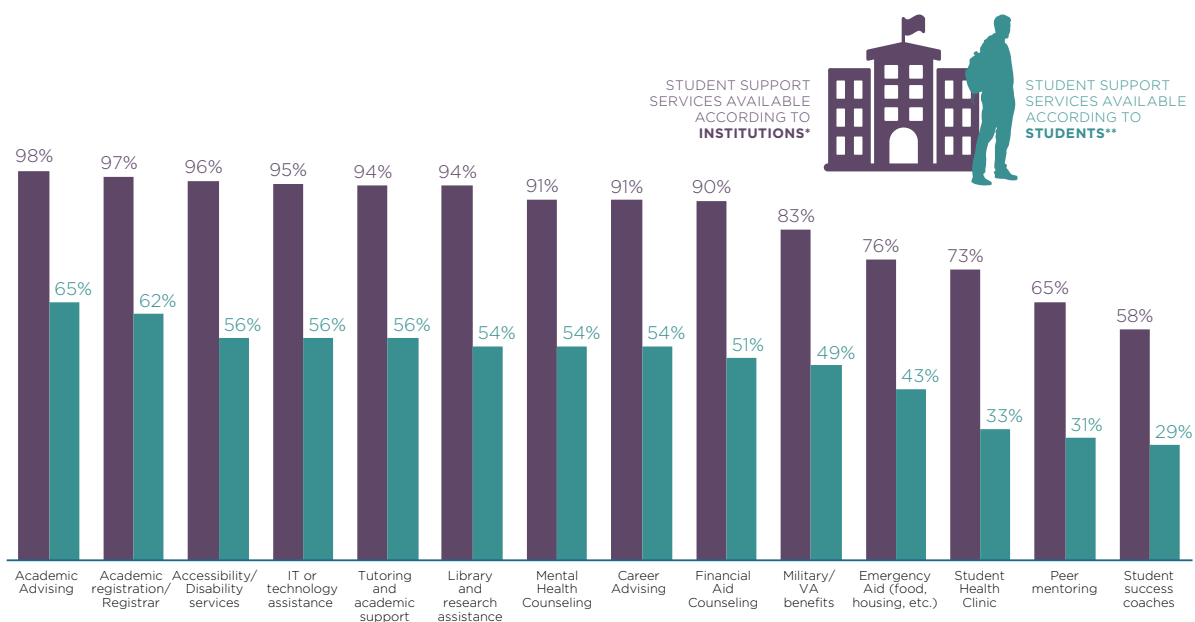
Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

# AWARENESS: ENGAGEMENT WITH ADVISING LIMITED BY CASELOAD

Advisors and administrators report low student engagement with advising resources as one of the top three barriers to improving advising for all students in 2023. We find that a large part of this barrier is low student *awareness* of student supports compared to available institutional services. As seen in *Figure 2*, less than two-thirds of student survey respondents identified academic advising, career advising, or even academic registration as available student support services, whereas close to all surveyed institutions said these services were available to students.

Figure 2:

## Student awareness of available support services



Notes: Survey question: "Which of the following student support services are available to students at your institution? Select all that apply." Administrator/advisor/faculty n=1,756; \*\*"Which of the following support services are available to you at your institution? Select all that apply." Student n=2,056

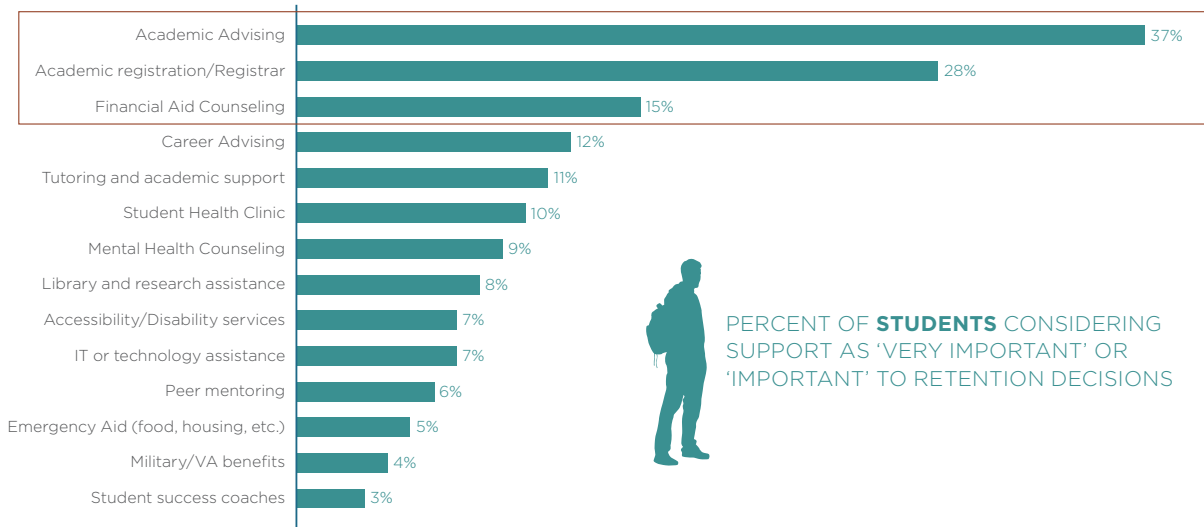
Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis

The disconnect between availability and student awareness of support services suggests a lack of effective communication. Faculty reported their own awareness of student supports was high, and most feel that institutional communication of these supports is effective. But administrators report that the top methods of communication to students about student supports are largely passive or isolated: the campus website, the student handbook, and new student orientation sessions. Institutions should consider targeted, active, and ongoing methods of communicating the availability of services to students such as in-class announcements and sustained text messaging/email campaigns.

Importantly, students who do engage with student support services recognize their benefits. In general, across institution types, students consider academic advising and financial aid among the top support services important to their retention decisions (see *Figure 3*).

Figure 3:

### Importance of student support services to retention



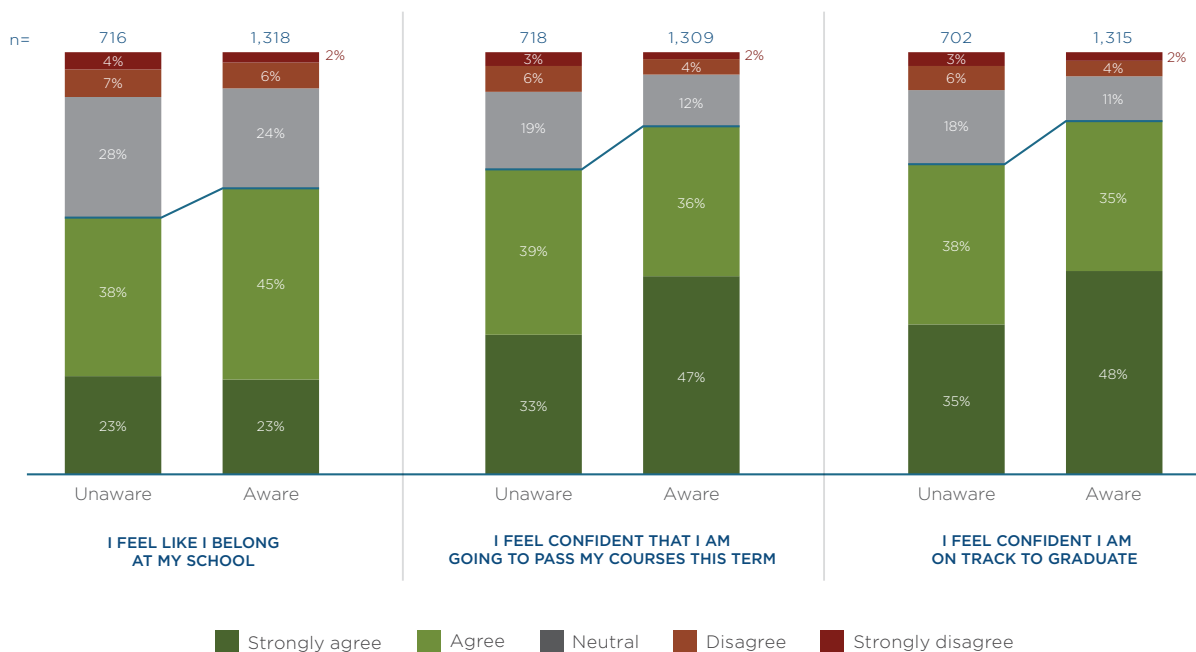
Notes: Survey question: "How important are the following support services to your decision to re-enroll next term?" Student n=2,056

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

Students aware of academic advising at their institution also report more confidence in passing their courses this term, being on track to graduate, and belonging at their institution (see Figure 4).

Figure 4:

### Student belonging and confidence by awareness of academic advising



Notes: Survey questions: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" "Which of the following support services are available to you at your institution? Select all that apply." Student n=2,056

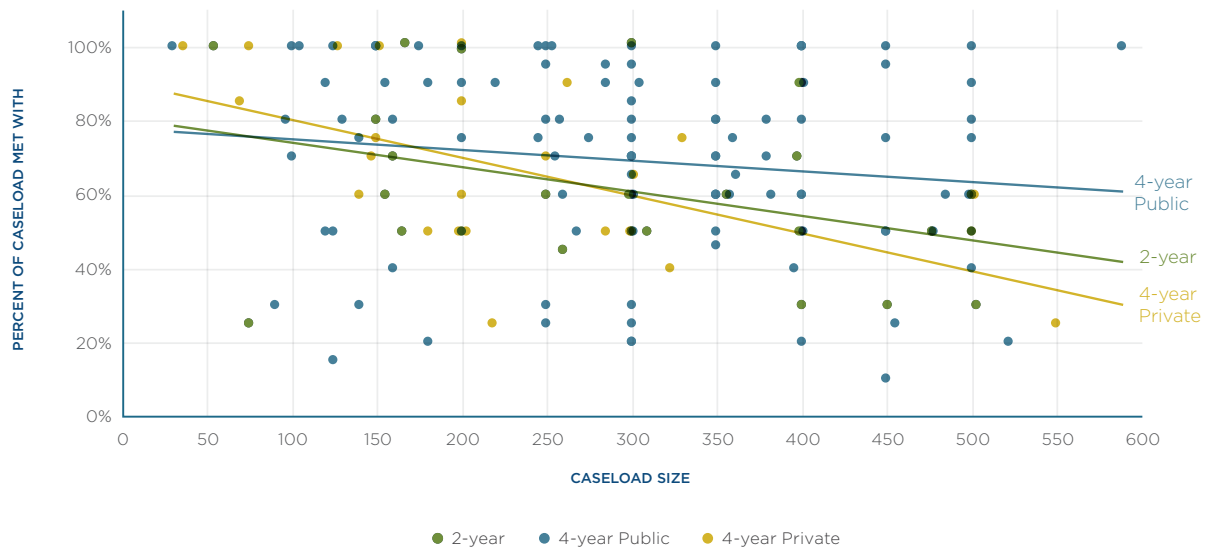
Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis



Requiring students to engage with academic advising through mandatory advising has proven to be an effective retention and persistence practice<sup>2</sup>. Importantly, academic advising interactions as discussed above also increase student awareness of support services<sup>3</sup>. However, our research finds that as academic advising caseloads increase, advisors are able to meet with a smaller proportion of their students each term (see Figure 5).

Figure 5:

### Percent of students met with by caseload at institutions that do NOT have mandatory advising implemented at scale



Notes: Survey questions: "What is the size of your advising caseload this term?" "What percentage of your caseload do you speak with every term?" Academic advisor n=360; Pearson correlation coefficient  $r = -.13$ ,  $p < .001$

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

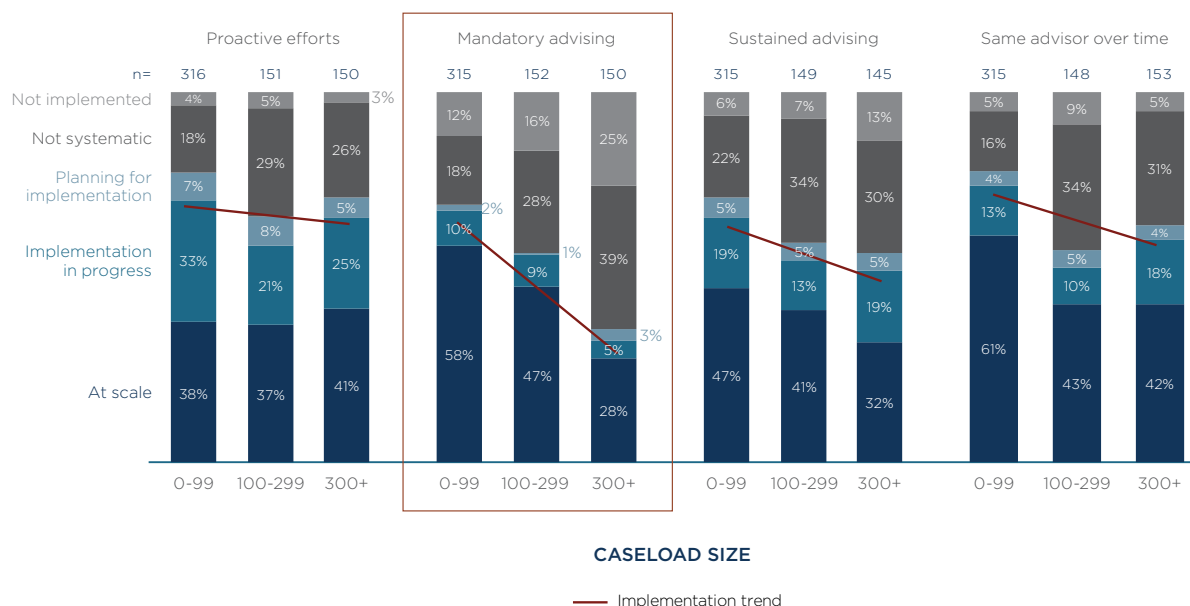
2. McFarlane, B. (2017, December). Mandatory advising, yes or no?. *Academic Advising Today*, 40(4). Retrieved from <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/Mandatory-Advising-Yes-or-No.aspx>
3. Cuseo, J. (n.d.). Academic advisement and student retention: empirical connections & systemic interventions. Retrieved from <http://www.uwc.edu/administration/academic-affairs/esfy/cuseo/academic%20advisement%20and%20student%20retention.doc>

Even at the 48% of institutions where mandatory advising is reportedly implemented “at scale,” caseload limits what percent of students are met with and, therefore, what percent of students are aware of advising, engage with it, and ultimately benefit from it.

High caseloads also limit the implementation of other high-impact advising practices, such as proactive efforts to reach out to struggling students and sustained advising throughout the student’s journey, as seen in *Figure 6*.

*Figure 6:*

### Implementation of high-impact advising practices by caseload size

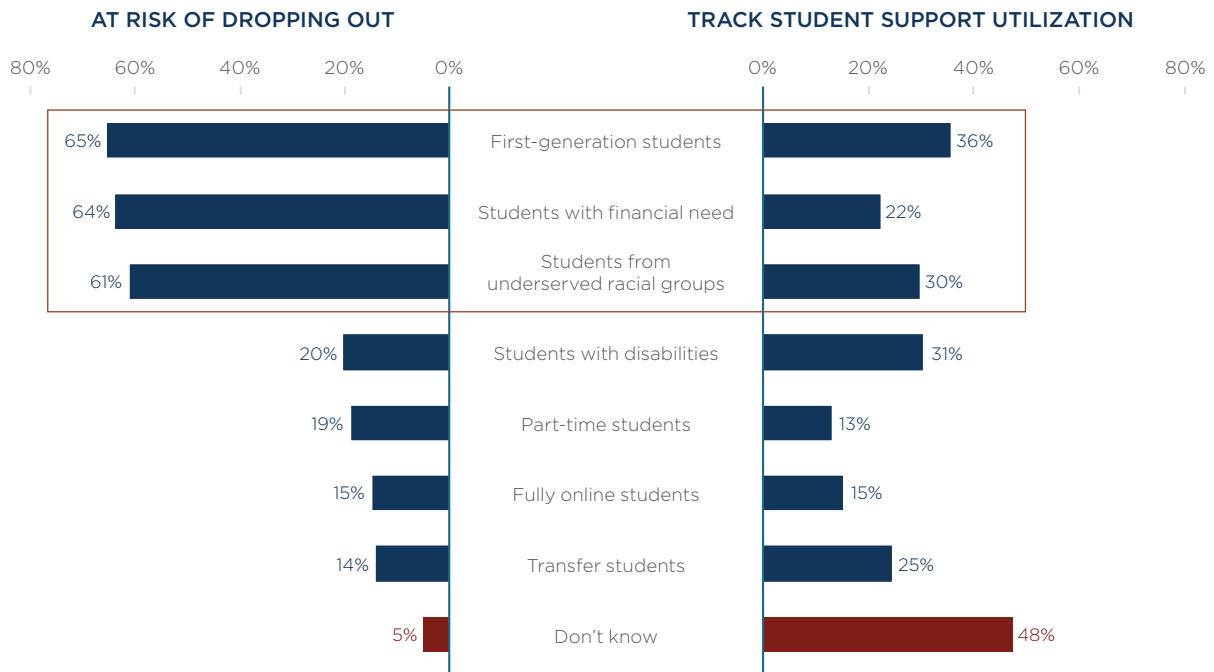


Notes: Survey question: “Please assess the degree to which your institution implements these student advising policies and practices. Proactive efforts to reach out to students when they appear to be struggling. Mandatory advising to ensure students engage with an advisor at least once per academic year. Sustained advising to engage students in supportive activities throughout their tenure at college, instead of, for example, only the first semester. Assignments of advisors to work with the same students over time.” Academic advisor n=660

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis

Which students are falling through the cracks and not engaging with advising or potentially even unaware of it? Most institutions don't know. Nearly two-thirds of academic advisors identify specific student subgroups as at risk of dropping out: first-generation students, students with financial need, and students from underserved racial groups – categories that can overlap. However, less than one-third of advisors report tracking the utilization of advising and other student supports for those subgroups (see *Figure 7*).

*Figure 7:*  
Student subgroups at risk of dropping out and tracking  
of their student support utilization



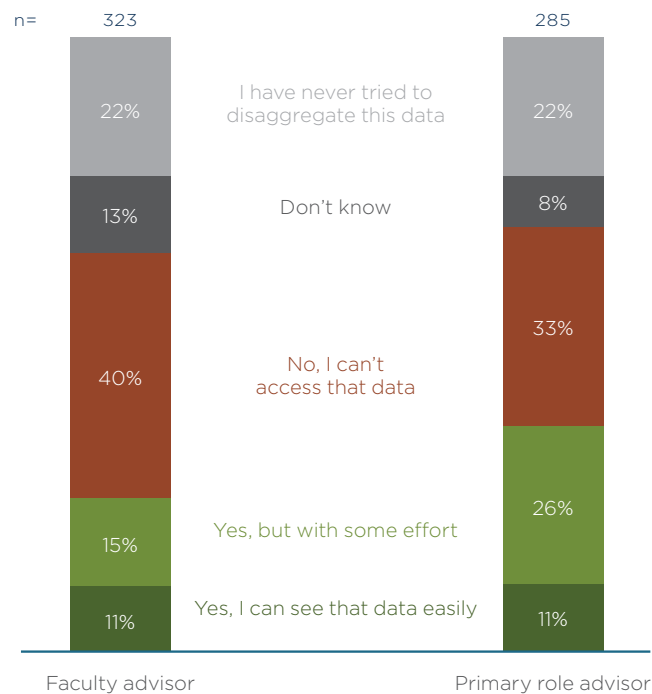
*Notes:* Survey questions: "Which student subgroups does your office perceive as particularly at risk of dropping out? Select all that apply." "Does your institution track student support utilization separately for the following subgroups? Select all that apply." Academic advisor n=660

*Sources:* Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

Close to half of advisors report not knowing if subgroup utilization is tracked, suggesting that the Head of Institutional Research (the role most often identified as being in charge of such data) is not communicating this information to advisors in actionable ways. This is again evident in *Figure 8*, showing that most academic advisors cannot identify the demographics of students they have not met with.

*Figure 8:*

### Ability to identify demographics of students in advising caseload not met



Notes: Survey question: "Considering the students in your caseload that you are unable to speak with, can you identify patterns in their demographics using resources made available to you?"

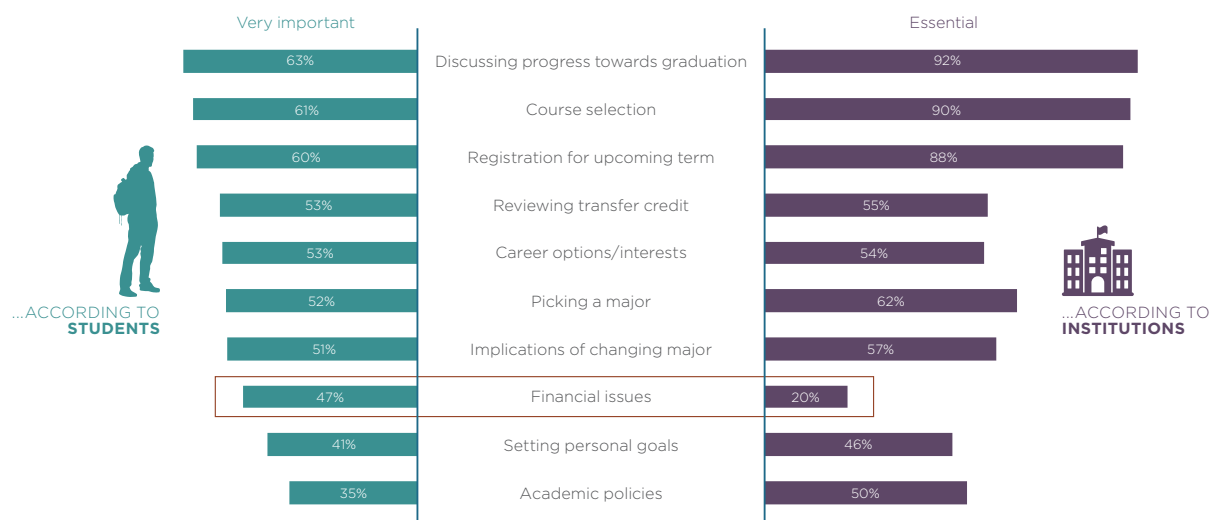
Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis

***"Not having adequate disaggregated information about students is related to a lack of understanding of student needs. But I would say even when institutions have that data, better training and onboarding are needed for a culturally responsive experience for students in their interactions with advisors."***

*– Elise Newkirk-Kotfila, Director of Advising Initiatives at NASPA*

Besides awareness, our research suggests that utilization of academic advising is hindered by misalignment between student and academic advisor perspectives on what topics are important to discuss during academic advising sessions. *Figure 9* shows that students and advisors agree on the high importance of course planning but while half of students believe financial issues are “very important” to discuss with academic advisors, advisors do not view them as part of their role. This response is likely because of a lack of training in financial aid counseling, limited integration with financial aid data, and the formalization of that role outside of academic advising.

*Figure 9:*  
Importance of advising topics



*Notes: Survey question: “Advisor meetings can cover a variety of topics. Please indicate whether you think the following topics are important or not important for you to discuss with your advisor [or caseload] (regardless of whether you actually cover the topics).” Students with academic advisors n=2,011, academic advisors n=660*  
*Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis*

Prior research also suggests that high-quality academic advising - defined as active and sustained engagement with *all* student concerns - is more predictive of future increased engagement with advising and increased perception of institutional support<sup>4</sup>.

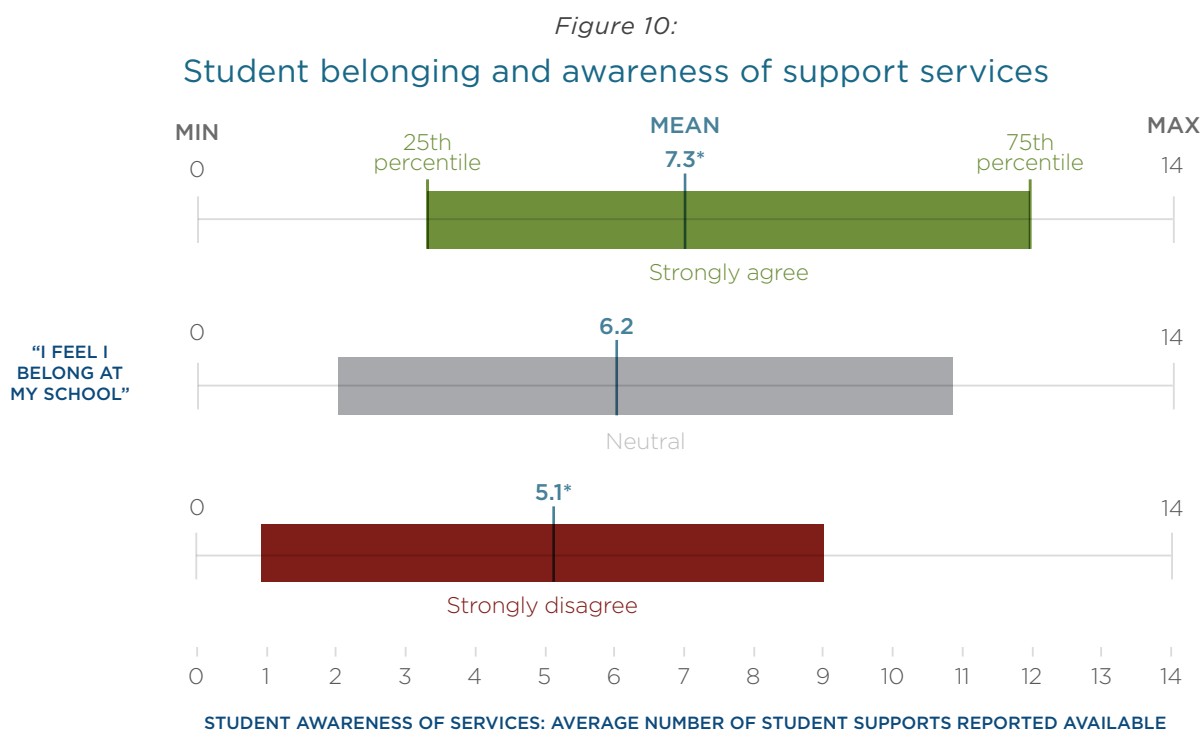
Improving awareness, access, and utilization of student success supports begins and ends with measuring said awareness, access, and utilization – particularly for our most vulnerable and underserved students.

4. National Survey of Student Engagement (2019). *Engagement Insights: Survey Findings on the Quality of Undergraduate Education—Annual Results 2019*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.

# BELONGING IS SUPPORTED BY HOLISTIC ADVISING

Student belonging is an important metric that research has directly linked to student success<sup>5</sup> and that is fortified by holistic student support services. Integrating financial aid, career services, and mental health services with academic advising can provide students with holistic advising – supporting students as a whole person with multiple areas of need<sup>6</sup>.

A necessary condition for holistic advising is student awareness of services beyond academic advising. Our data in *Figure 10* shows that students who report higher levels of awareness of all available student support services also report higher levels of belonging in their campus community.



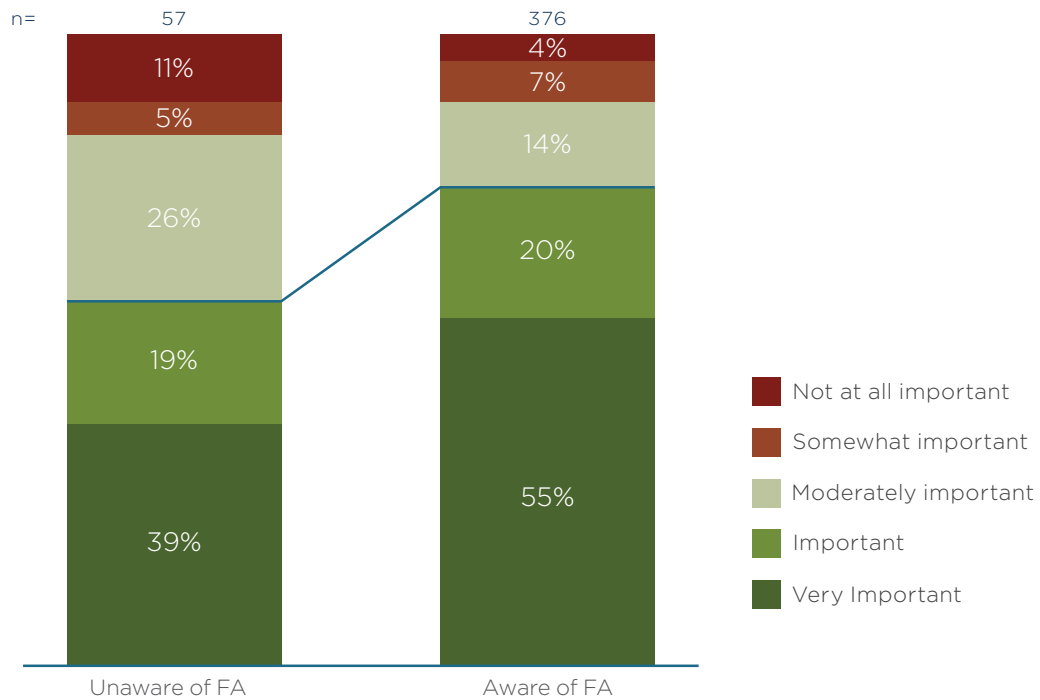
Notes: Survey question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I feel like I belong at my school." "Which of the following support services are available to you at your institution? Select all that apply." (14 options provided); student n=2,056, \*statistically significant difference of means at p<.001.  
Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis

- Karp, M. M. (2018). (CCRC Working Paper No. 28). *Toward a New Understanding of Non-Academic Student Support: Four Mechanisms Encouraging Positive Student Outcomes in the Community College* New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED516148.pdf>
- Lawton, J., & Toner, M. (2020). Supporting the Success of Students Enrolled Part-Time. *Equity in Design for Holistic Student Supports. A Series of Four Briefs Examining the Support Needs of Different Community College Student Populations*. Achieving the Dream.

Each student support service addresses unique needs and contributes to belonging in different ways. For example, though not all students require the support of financial aid services, *Figure 11* shows that students who are aware of financial aid services at their institution identify it as important to their retention decisions.

Figure 11:

### Student awareness of financial aid services at their institution and importance of financial aid to retention decisions



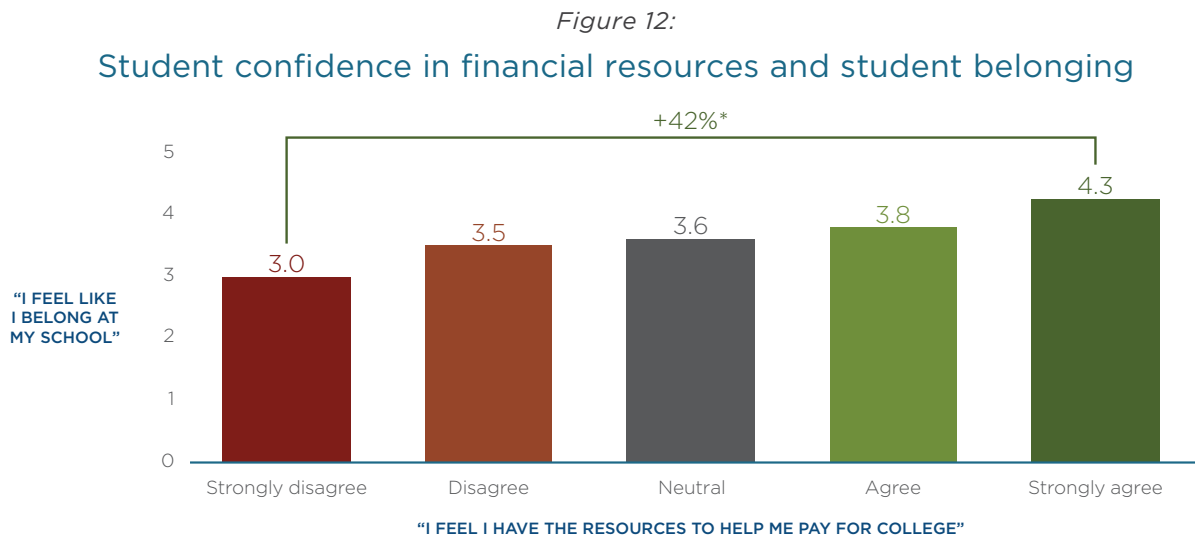
Notes: Survey question: "Which of the following support services are available to you at your institution? Select all that apply."  
 "How important are the following support services to your decision to re-enroll next term?"

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

***"[I learned from my academic advisor] the resources my school provides, and how I can use them"***

*– Student at two-year, public institution*

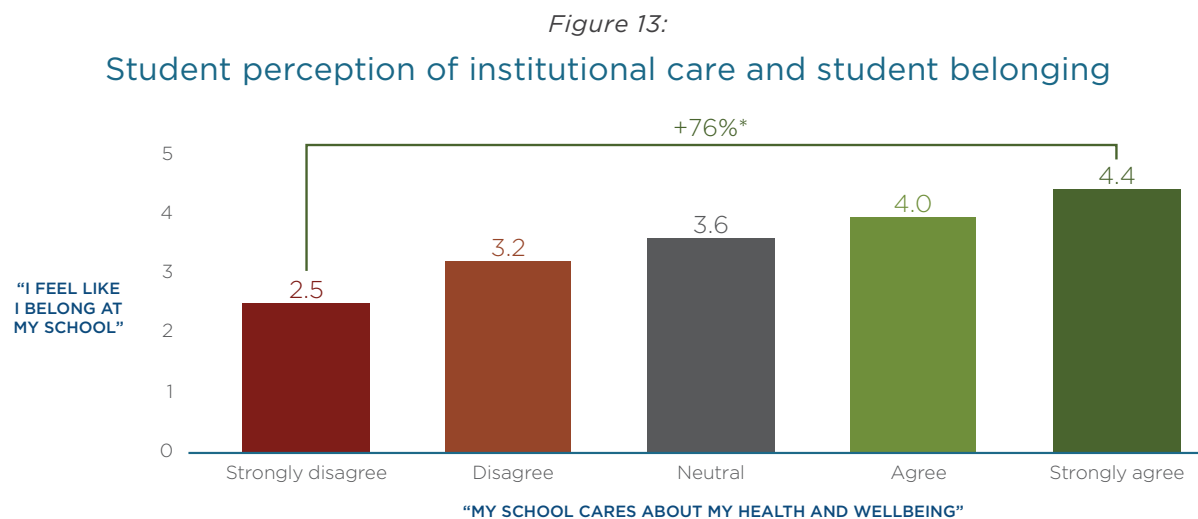
Furthermore, students who feel more strongly that they have the necessary resources to pay for college also report higher rates of belonging (see *Figure 12*).



Notes: Survey questions: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I feel like I belong at my school; I feel I have the resources to help me pay for college," student n=2,056; \*statistically significant difference,  $p < .001$ .

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis

Another example is that students who have interacted with career services at their institution are also more likely to believe their college experience is preparing them for a job or career. And, students who have interacted with mental health services are more likely to believe their school cares about their health and well-being. As shown in *Figure 13*, students who perceive that their institution cares about their health and well-being also report higher levels of belonging.



Notes: Survey question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I feel like I belong at my school; My school cares about my health and wellbeing," student n=2,056

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis



Student needs are interconnected, not compartmentalized into academic, financial, and well-being concerns, but student support services are often siloed. Academic advisors who have visibility into their students' engagement with other student supports are empowered to provide more effective advising that meets all student needs.

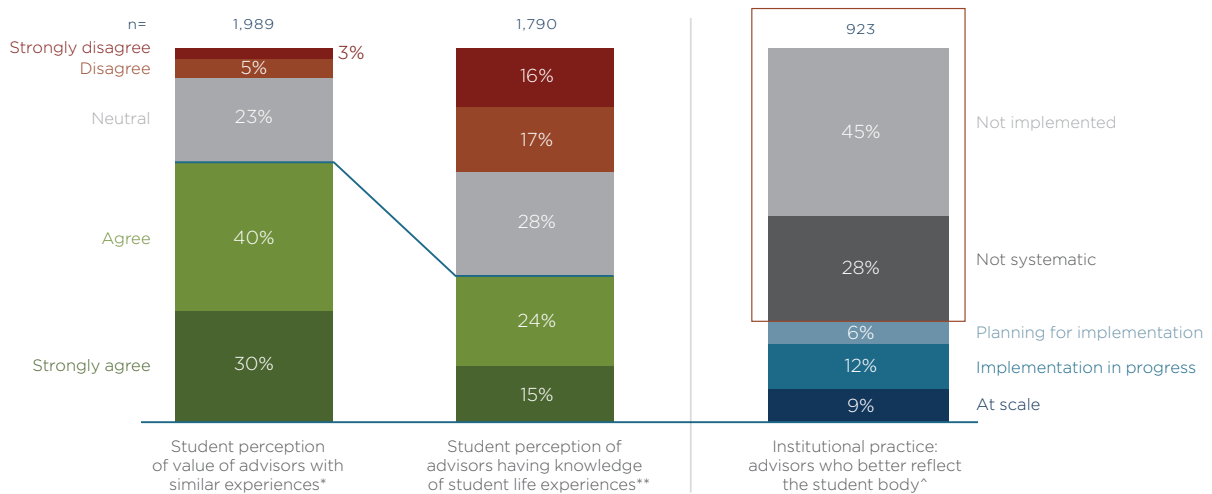
***“[I learned from my advisor] to be more compassionate and less hard on myself and truly enjoy the college experience”***

*– Student with financial need at a four-year, public institution*

A final area of misalignment is a lack of diversity in student support professionals. As seen in *Figure 14*, institutions do not yet have advisors who represent the student body despite this being important to 70% of students.

Figure 14:

### Representation matters



Notes: Survey questions: \**“To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: It’s important to me that my school has counselors and advisors that represent my life experiences?”*; \*\**“My advisor knows enough about my life experiences (e.g., race / ethnicity, first-generation student, veteran status) to provide personalized advice and options.”*; ^*“Please assess the degree to which your institution implements these academic advising policies and practices.”*

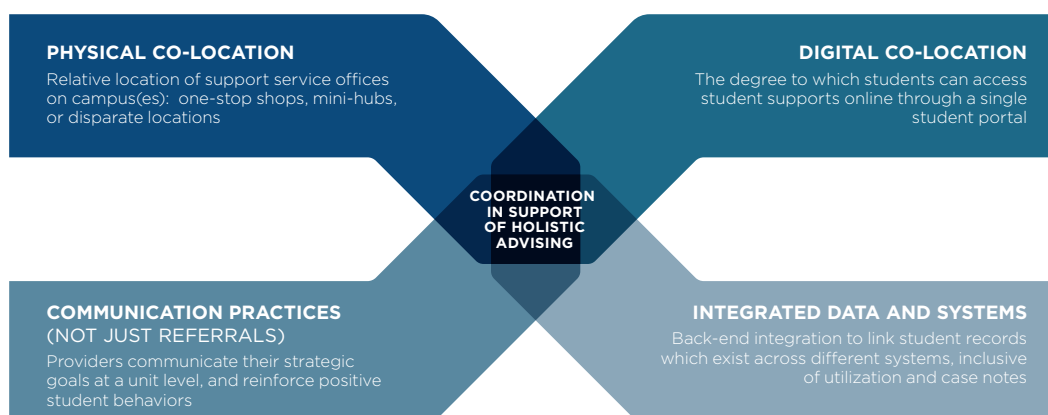
Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis

# COORDINATION IS VITAL TO HOLISTIC ADVISING

Achieving holistic advising comes from coordination and integration between student supports. We define the key elements of coordination of student supports as physical co-location, digital co-location, integrated data and systems, and effective communication between providers.

Figure 15:

## Tyton Partners' coordination framework

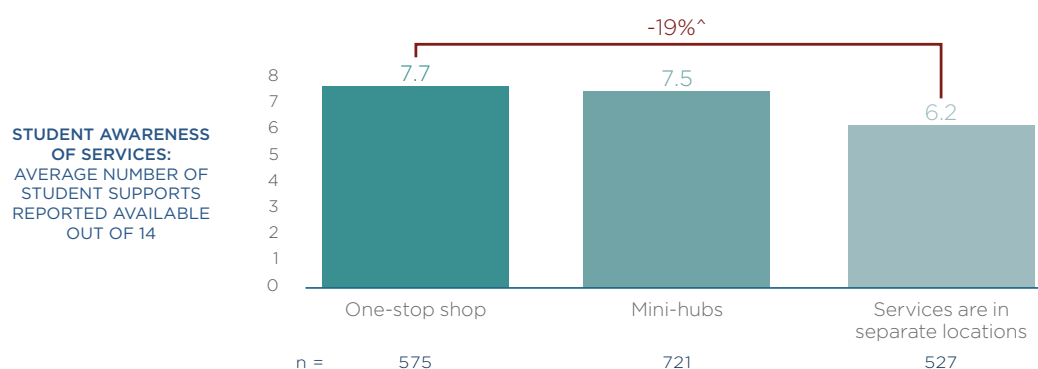


Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis

First, students who reported that their institution physically organizes student support offices in either a one-stop shop or in mini-hub clusters showed awareness of a higher number of services than students whose institutions do not physically co-locate student support services (see Figure 16). This finding is corroborated in a recent report by Achieving the Dream<sup>7</sup>, which states, "many [institutions]... are shifting to a holistic approach to supporting students, with support services co-located or interconnected."

Figure 16:

## Awareness of student supports by organization of support offices



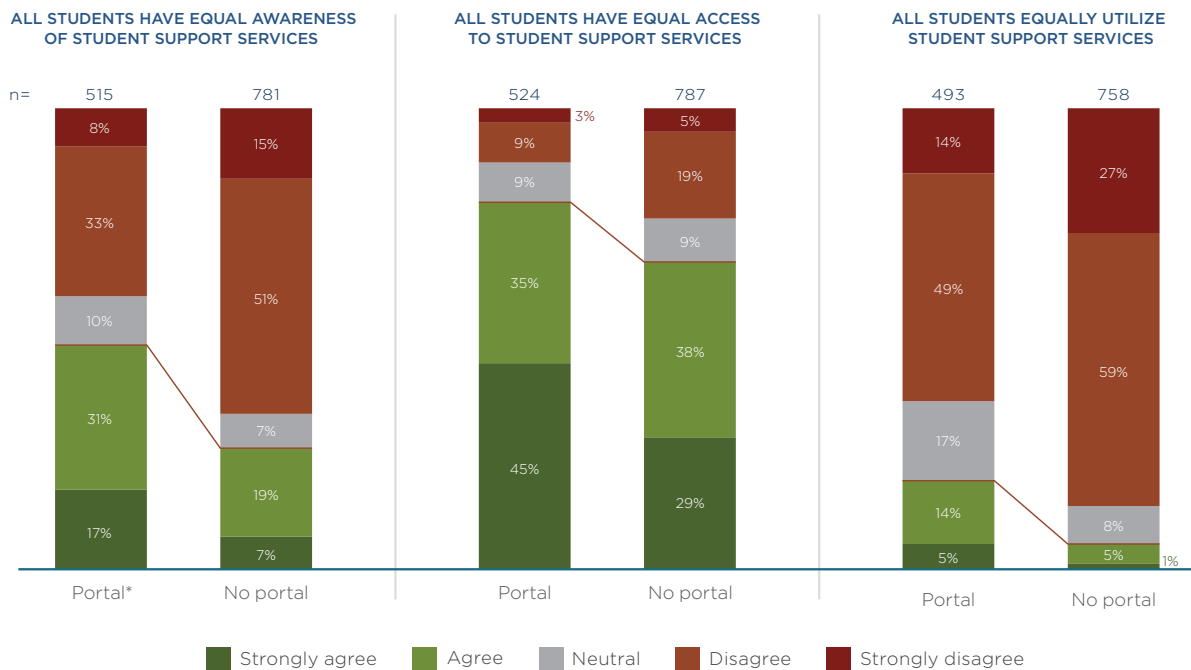
Note: Survey questions: "Which of the following support services are available to you at your institution? Select all that apply." n = 2056 "How are these student support provider offices arranged on campus?"; ^statistically significant difference at p<.01.

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis

7. Achieving the Dream, Advising Success Network. (2023). *Knowing Our Students: Understanding and Designing for Success*. A guidebook for institutional leaders.

Second, this physical coordination also extended to digital co-location: institutions with physically co-located services more frequently reported the availability of a single online portal through which students could access resources. Institutions with digitally co-located services reported a belief that all students have equal awareness and access to student support services more than institutions without a centralized portal. This suggests a similarly positive impact of co-location (both digital and physical) on awareness and access. However, the majority of advisors, regardless of the support services structure, do not report that all students equally utilize services as seen in *Figure 17*.

*Figure 17:*  
Student awareness, access, and utilization of student supports by availability of a digital portal



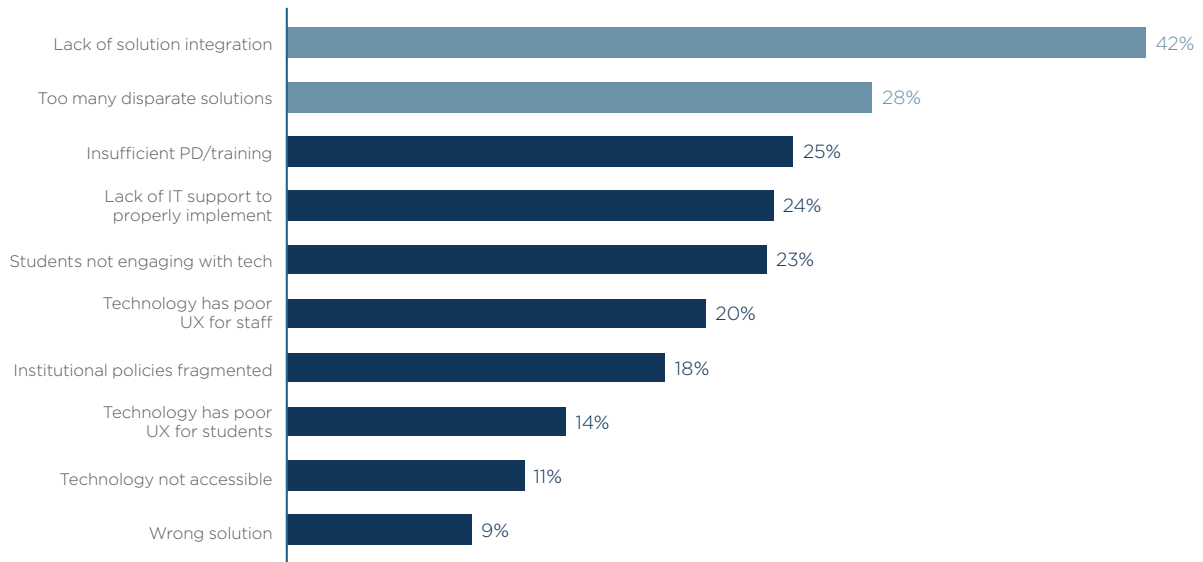
*Notes: Survey questions: "Are the online equivalents of the student support services you selected accessible through a single student support or resource portal?" "Please choose the phrase that best describes your level of agreement with the following statements regarding student supports." Administrator/advisor/faculty n=1,324*

*Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis*

Third, though the use of advising technology such as digital portals is widespread and generally believed to improve equitable access, our research suggests that coordination is difficult to achieve: a lack of solution integration and too many disparate solutions are the top two barriers to effectively using advising technologies (see *Figure 18*).

*Figure 18:*

### Top barriers to using advising technology



Notes: Survey question: "What are the top barriers to effectively using advising technology at your institution? Select top three."  
Administrator/advisor/faculty n=1,220

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis

---

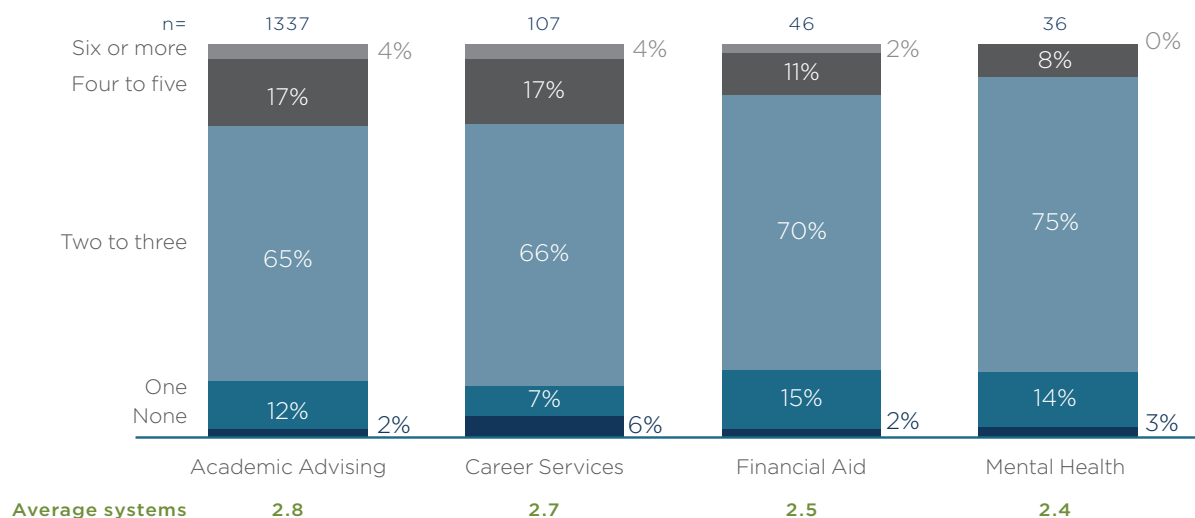
***"Advisors are suffering from tool fatigue. Many new tools give access to important student data and some institutions are buying products designed to make things easier. But all of those add up."***

*– Sean Bridgen, Associate Director for External and Institutional Partnerships at NACADA*

Administrators with oversight are more sensitive to the lack of integration: directors and above are less likely to say that systems are integrated and more likely to believe in a need for better integration than advisors. Moreover, these issues have worsened as the problem of having too many disparate solutions jumped from being the fourth-highest barrier in 2022<sup>8</sup> to the second-highest barrier in 2023. *Figure 19* shows how providers across student support services report using two to three systems or resources to facilitate a session. These systems are proliferating as the portion of advisors that report using only one application has declined by 15% since our 2022 study<sup>7</sup>.

*Figure 19:*

### Number of systems needed for an advising session by office



Notes: Survey question: "How many different products or systems do you use as part of your sessions with students?"

Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis

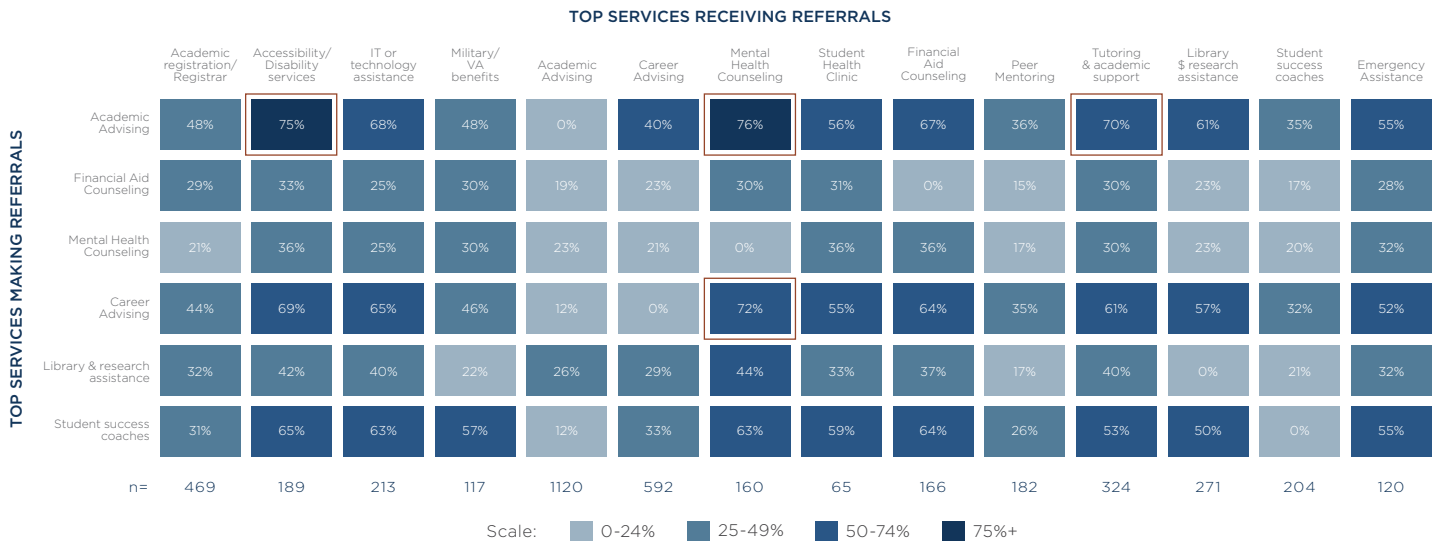
Despite these challenges, there is some progress toward integration. Institutions with integration solutions in progress alongside other advising technologies last year have now reportedly implemented them at scale. For instance, in 2022, 20% of institutions had implemented integration solutions at scale. In 2023, this figure rose to 27 percent.

However, the NPS for this category of technology solutions is very low at -35 for director-level respondents and up, suggesting there is room for providers to better understand use cases needed, improve user experience, and improve the return on investment for integration technologies. Another explanation for this unmet need for improvement in the use of technology to support holistic advising could be that IT staff are stretched too thin at institutions. Market salaries of technology talent are competitive, and some universities are experiencing high turnover.

8. Shaw, C., Bharadwaj, P., Smith, S., Spence, M., Nguyen, A., & Bryant, G. (2022). *Driving Toward a Degree – 2022*. Tyton Partners.

Fourth, institutional respondents confirmed frequent referrals between providers pointing to opportunities for integration (see *Figure 20*). Academic advisors and career services advisors emerged as the most frequent source of referrals, while mental health and accessibility/disability services were the most frequent recipients of referrals. Given the volume of referral activity, advising technology stands to increase effective communication between student support providers.

*Figure 20:*  
Referrals between student supports



*Notes: Survey questions: "Which of the following student supports do you directly provide? Select all that apply." "Which of the following student supports do you refer students to? Select all that apply." Student support providers n = 1,756*

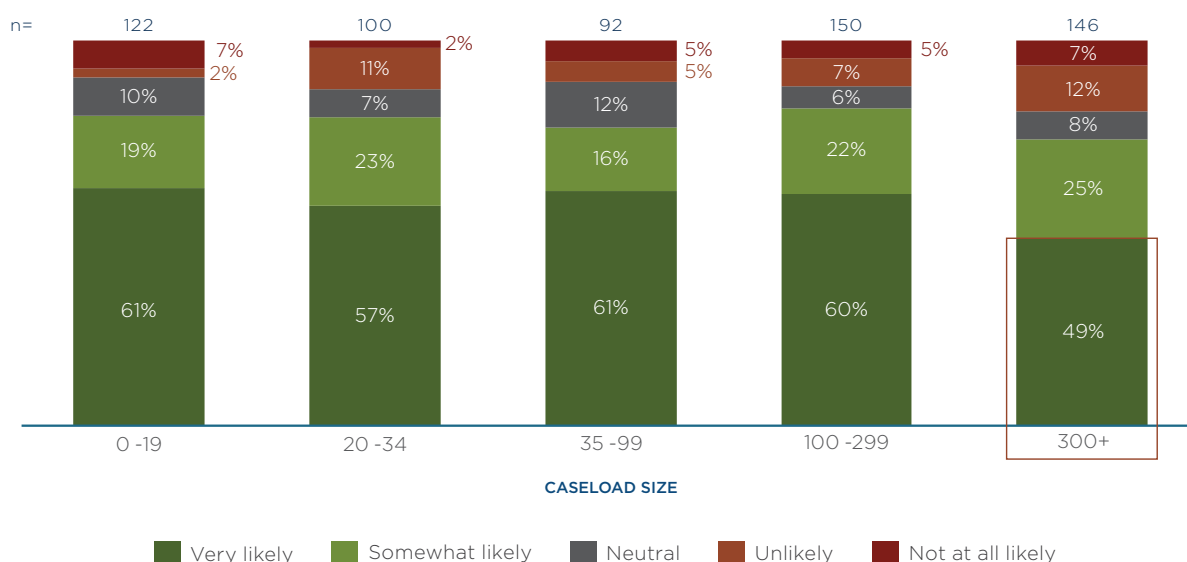
*Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis*

## AN EMERGING CONCERN: ADVISOR RETENTION

While low student engagement, high caseloads, and limited integration generally pose the greatest barriers to implementing effective advising, a fourth barrier recently rose to the top of advisor concerns: high advisor turnover. This year, 28% of advisors reported that high advisor turnover and difficulty with retention was a top three challenge to effective advising, rising from 15% in prior years. Concern is greater at large, four-year public universities, where 34% of advisors identified retention as a top barrier to advising. Advisors at four-year public institutions also have higher caseloads and advisors with higher caseloads report a lower likelihood of remaining in their role in the next five years (see *Figure 21*).

Figure 21:

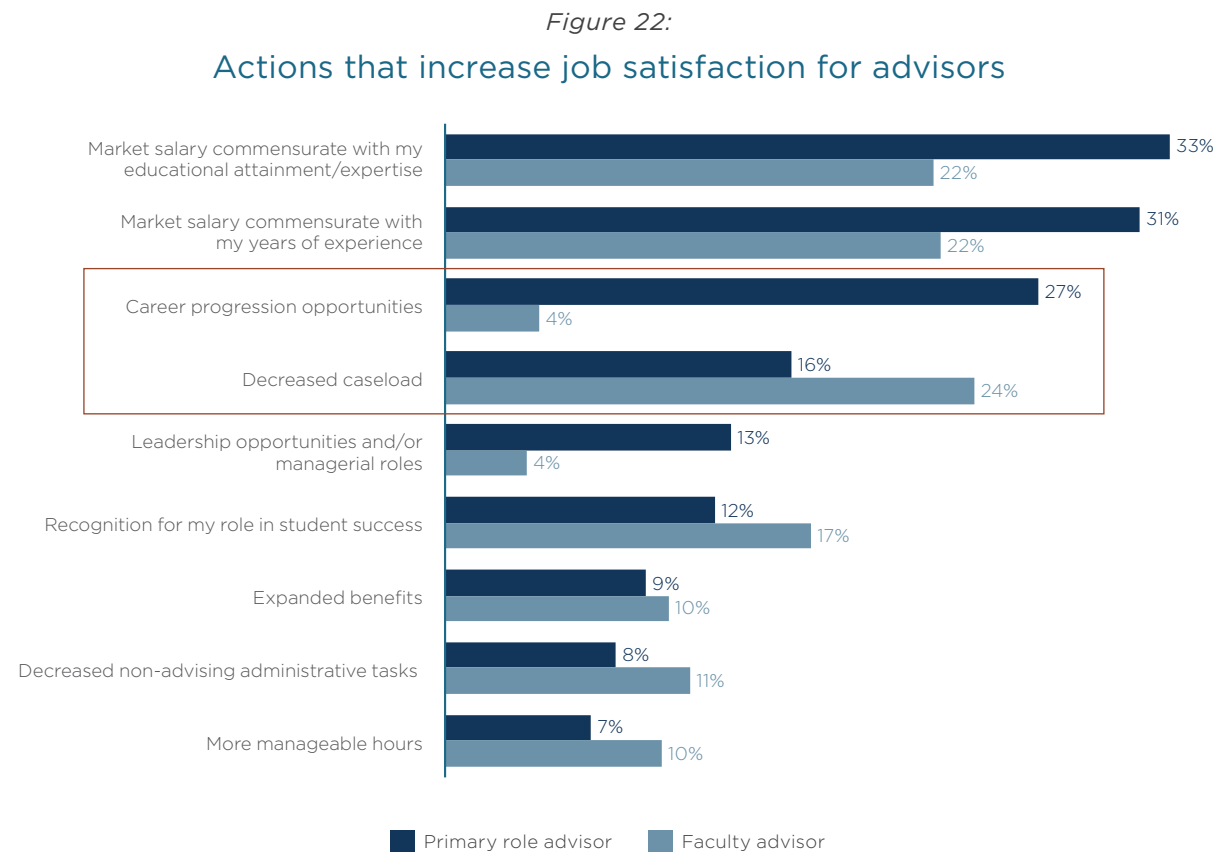
### Impact of caseload on advisor retention



Notes: Survey question: "How likely are you to continue in your career as an advisor in the next five years?" "What is the size of your advising student caseload for this spring term? (Please enter a numeric value.)" Academic advisor n=660

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

Though two-thirds of advisors reported satisfaction with their job, one-third of advisors who reported dissatisfaction identified market salaries commensurate with their educational attainment and years of experience as most likely to increase job satisfaction, as shown in *Figure 22*.



*Notes:* Survey question: “Which of the following would increase your job satisfaction? Select top three.” Academic advisor n=660

*Sources:* *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis

Nearly 90% of professional advisors in our survey have master’s degrees or doctorates, and they also expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of career progression opportunities in their role as advisors. Academic advisors who identify as White and female are also overrepresented in our sample and nationally. As Sean Bridgen, Associate Director for External and Institutional Partnerships at NACADA reminds us, this dissatisfaction with compensation and leadership opportunities may be associated with this demographic trend as a multitude of research<sup>9</sup> demonstrates how “feminized work is devalued.”

9. Busch, F. (2017). Occupational devaluation due to feminization? Causal mechanics, effect heterogeneity, and evidence from the United States, 1960 to 2010. *Social Forces*, 96(3), 1351–1376. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sox077>

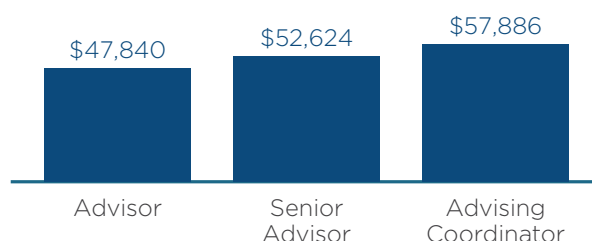


### CASE STUDY: CLEARLY DEFINED ACADEMIC ADVISOR CAREER PATH AT UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

Academic advisors at the University of Tennessee participate in a comprehensive professional development program. The program is intended to incentivize the advancement of advisor knowledge and skills through discrete roles along an advisor’s career path. As advisors demonstrate mastery of the elements in a committee-approved rubric, they work with a supervisor to submit a portfolio and be considered for advancement into such roles as Senior Academic Advisor and Master Advising Coordinator with corresponding increases in both pay (see Figure 23) and leadership/managerial opportunities. The advisor career path and professional development program address most of the actions that advisors say would increase their job satisfaction in our research.

Figure 23:

University of Tennessee annual reference salary along academic advisor career path<sup>10</sup>



Notes: Average annual salaries reported as of 2015

Sources: University of Tennessee Knoxville, *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*, Tyton Partners analysis

10. University of Tennessee Knoxville Academic Advising. (2017). Academic Advisor Career Path. University of Tennessee Knoxville.

# IMPLICATIONS

This year, the Driving Toward a Degree study explored the perspectives of students, advisors, and administrators on support services. Through a comparison of the perspectives of these three audiences, we were able to identify opportunities to improve awareness, belonging, and coordination of student support services. We found that students who use academic advising, financial aid counseling, and health services feel more connected to their institution. However, many students are unaware of the available support services, and the effectiveness of advising is hindered by advisors having caseloads that are too high. This limits the impact of investments in student support services.

To improve student outcomes, we encourage institutions and solution providers to focus on three areas:

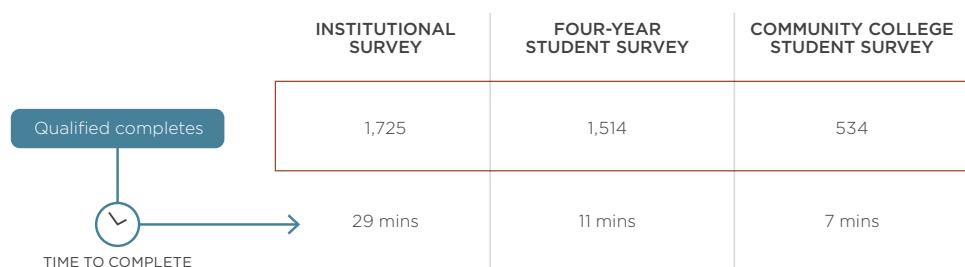
- 1. Increase awareness:** Actively remind students of resources available to them through as many channels as possible: syllabi, regular announcements in classroom settings, nudges in core systems, website updates, pushed messaging, and advisor meetings.
- 2. Foster belonging:** Encourage students to seek out financial aid counseling, health services, and career services as students who leverage these supports report an increased sense of belonging at their institution.
- 3. Reinforce coordination:** Recognize and prioritize the coordination and integration of support services, aiming for holistic advising that addresses all aspects of student life.

# SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Driving Toward a Degree is a series of national, longitudinal surveys of over 4,000 higher education students, advisors, faculty, and administrators. The survey is designed to evaluate the state of student support services – academic advising in particular – at higher education institutions across the United States and identify barriers to access and success for all students.

For this year’s study, advisors, faculty, administrators, and students received online surveys ranging from 10 to 40 minutes (depending on their individual roles) in March of 2023. We collected responses from approximately 1,700 institutional stakeholders at close to 900 unique postsecondary institutions and over 2,000 students from both two- and four-year private and public institutions.

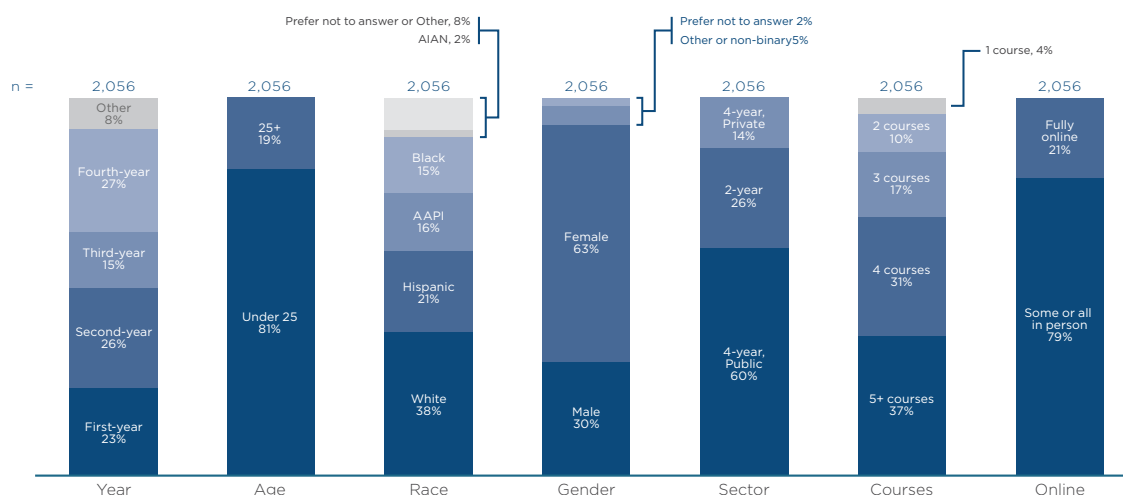
*Figure 24:*  
**Driving Toward a Degree 2023 surveys**



Source: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis*

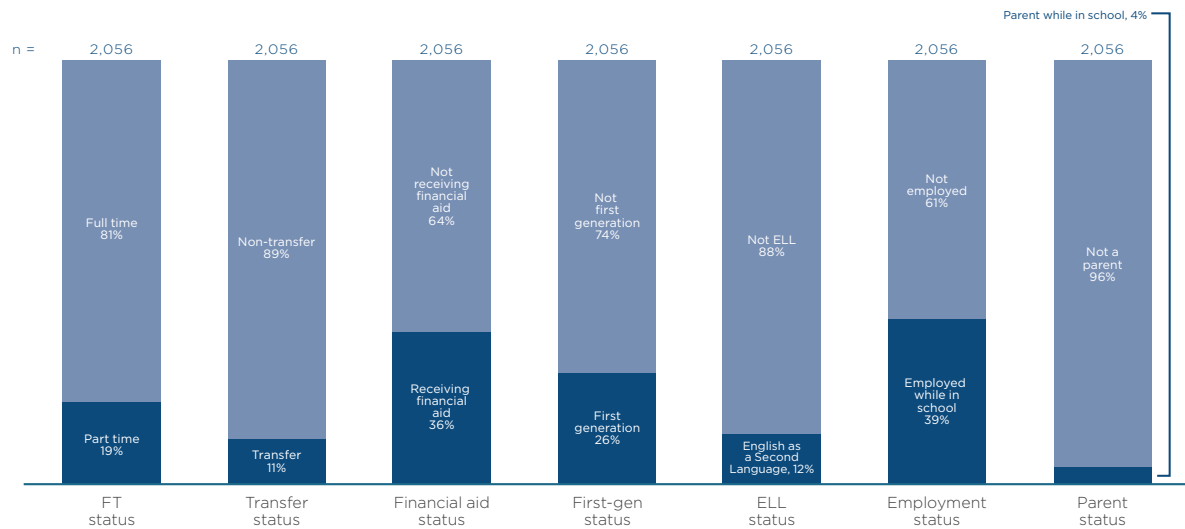
This year’s survey gathered responses from a representative set of advisors, administrators, faculty, and students nationwide in terms of region, age, race, gender, and other collected demographic information. Because not all questions were presented to every respondent, response numbers vary by segment. Due to rounding, percentages may sum slightly more or less than 100%.

*Figure 25:*  
**Student survey respondent demographics**



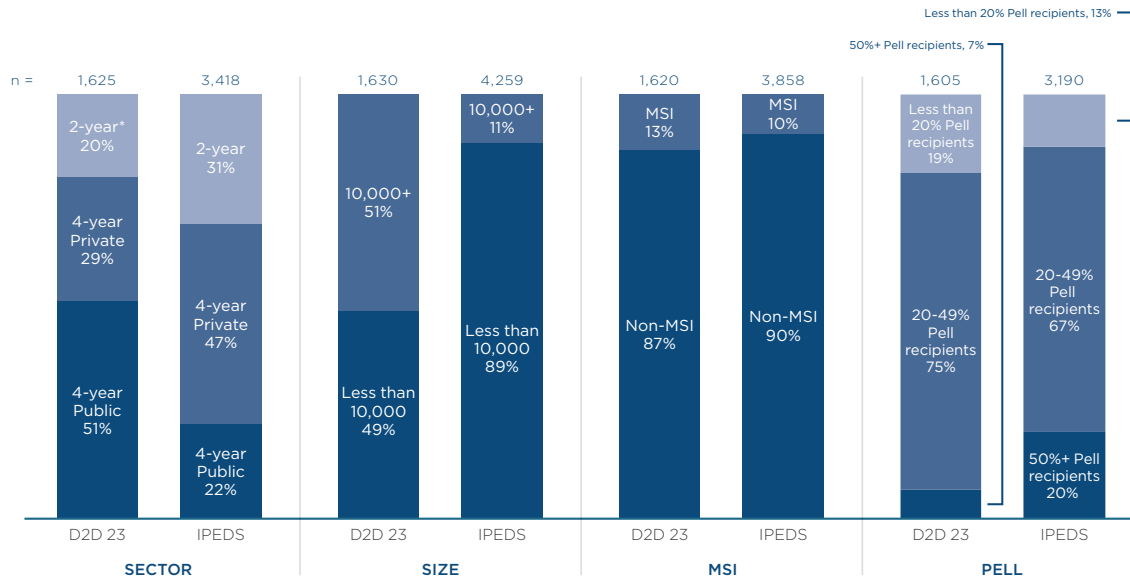
Sources: *Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis*

Figure 26:  
Student survey respondent profile



Notes: International students make up 3% of responses; Active and veteran military make up 1% of responses; all data is self-reported  
Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

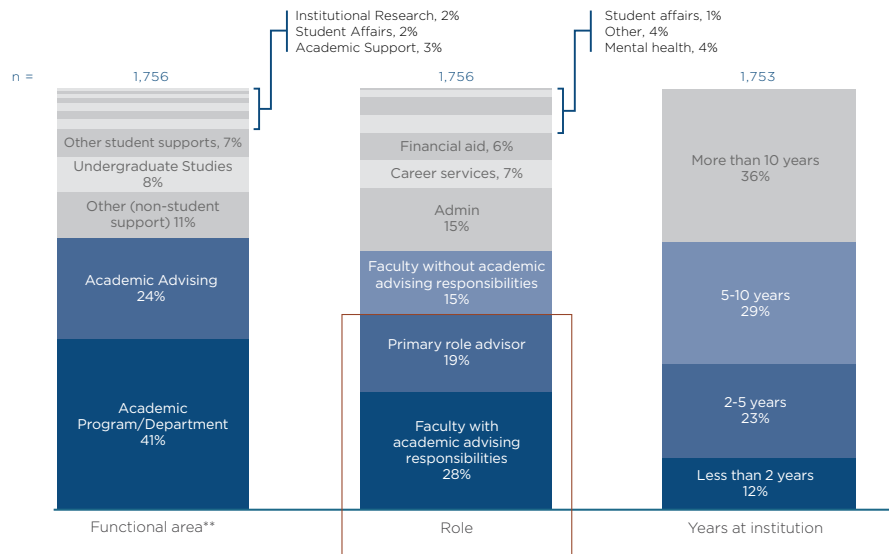
Figure 27:  
Comparison of respondent institutions and IPEDS distribution



Notes: \*"MSI" = Minority Serving Institution  
Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

Figure 28:

## Institutional survey respondent profile

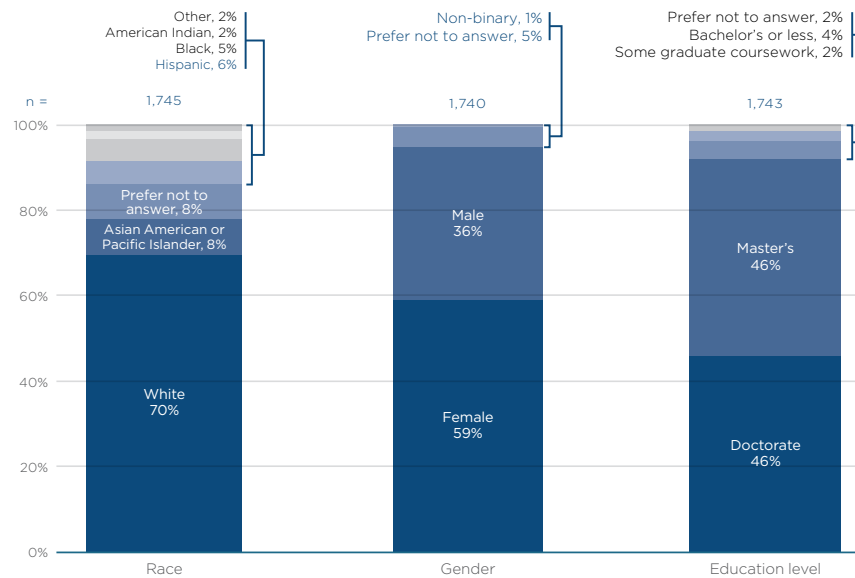


Notes: Academic advisors include faculty with academic advising responsibilities and primary role advisors; Functional areas with less than 2% of respondents were excluded

Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

Figure 29:

## Institutional survey respondent demographics



Sources: Driving Toward a Degree 2023, Tyton Partners analysis

Based on the entire response set, the 95% confidence interval is +/- 2% for questions asked of advisors. Questions addressed to a smaller subset because of skip logic have wider confidence intervals. As with all large-scale surveys, D2D has the potential for bias. It is possible that respondents willing to take the time to discuss their own experiences with advising have stronger opinions than those who chose not to participate.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our research would not be possible without our respondents – thank you to all the students, instructors, advisors, counselors, and administrators who so thoughtfully shared their experiences with the field to further elevate best practices in supporting student success.

This year, our research is supported by our anchor partner, Anthology, and our research partners, InsideTrack, Lumina Foundation, Stellic, and NACADA.

We are grateful for survey instrument review and advisement from Dr. Karen Bussey.

In addition, we'd like to thank our operational partners, College Pulse and Centiment, for student survey outreach, NACADA for support in advisor outreach and research insight, Andy Sherman at Can of Creative for graphics and design support, and Jacqueline Renfrow for copyediting.

## **EXAMPLES ARE NOT ENDORSEMENTS:**

This document includes examples and resources for the reader's reference. The presence of these materials is not an endorsement of any expressed views, products, or services. The materials feature opinions and recommendations from different experts, along with hyperlinks and websites that belong to other public and private organizations.

## ABOUT TYTON PARTNERS

Tyton Partners is designed to be different. As the only advisory firm dedicated to the rapidly evolving Global Education Sector, we have constructed a team of bankers, principal investors, consultants, operators, and educators to deliver industry-defining insights to power executives' and investors' critical decisions. For more information, visit [tytonpartners.com](https://tytonpartners.com).

### CITING THIS RESOURCE

Bharadwaj, P., Shaw, C., Condon, K., Rich, J., Janson, N., & Bryant, G. (2023, July 19). *Driving Toward a Degree 2023*. Tyton Partners.