STUDENT
SUCCESS

How Institutions Can Boost Graduation Rates

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In 2016, the *New York Times* reported that of all the jobs created in the United States since 2008, 99 percent went to people who had some college experience; 72 percent went to people who had at least a bachelor's degree.

Gallup finds that 70 percent of Americans now consider a college education "very important." In 1979, that figure stood at just 36 percent.

Driving the point home, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the percentage of high school graduates opting for higher education has risen in each of the past three years. Why? A Georgetown University study predicts that 3 million jobs will be left unfilled in 2018 because workers lack the requisite skills.

We are seeing these trends reflected around the world, and despite what we hear about shifting demographics, budget cuts, and the returns on investment students receive, the numbers point to an era in which student success will drive our shared prosperity like never before.

That's why we've asked thought leaders across higher education and the private sector to share their perspectives on how best to seize the opportunities ahead. Recruiting. Retention. Development. Increasing efficiency. Breaking down the information silos that impede informed decision making across the campus. These are just a few of the topics you'll find covered in the pages to follow.

From best practices to peer recommendations to personal experiences, we've tapped into the collaborative spirit of higher education to help you create a modern, connected campus that meets every student, faculty, and staff member's need. We hope this guide is helpful as you lead your institution into the exciting times ahead.

Regards,
Jeff Ray
President and CEO
Ellucian

ellucian.

Ellucian is the worldwide leader of software and services designed for higher education. More than 2,400 institutions in 40 countries rely on Ellucian to help enable the mission of higher education for over 18 million students. Ellucian provides student information systems (SIS), finance and HR, recruiting, retention, analytics and advancement software solutions. With more than 1,400 unique deployments of Ellucian's cloud and SaaS offerings, the company is one of the largest providers of cloud-based solutions. Ellucian also supports the higher education community with a range of professional services, such as application software implementation, training, education, and management consulting.
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These are exciting — and trying — times for higher education. Many institutions face smaller, tighter budgets but feel the pressure to modernize technologies to stay competitive.

Through a generous partnership with Ellucian, we've spoken with 20 institutional leaders and experts to learn more about technology challenges and trends in five key focal areas: student success, cloud computing, analytics, advancement, and talent management.

We asked five experts the following question about student success: Please tell us about the recent implementation of a new technology (eg. early alerting, early engagement, degree planning solution) that has had a major impact on student success. What metrics were used to benchmark success?

During these discussions, the experts shared success stories about operational efficiency, student and staff engagement, and degree completion. They also recounted lessons learned from the challenges they faced while putting new technologies into place.

One thing they all agree on is that when implemented properly and executed well, technology is a platform on which all postsecondary learning institutions can build success. These professionals also highlighted the need for a holistic view of technology across the institution and a concrete plan for campuswide deployment as essential for success.

I trust you'll find these experts' insights and advice useful and that after reading this book, you'll come away with solid strategies to help advance the use of technology in your college or university.

All the best,
David Rogelberg
Publisher

𝕞 Mighty Guides

Mighty Guides make you stronger.

These authoritative and diverse guides provide a full view of a topic. They help you explore, compare, and contrast a variety of viewpoints so that you can determine what will work best for you. Reading a Mighty Guide is kind of like having your own team of experts. Each heartfelt and sincere piece of advice in this guide sits right next to the contributor's name, biography, and links so that you can learn more about their work. This background information gives you the proper context for each expert's independent perspective.

Credible advice from top experts helps you make strong decisions. Strong decisions make you mighty.

Student Success

Our website and our student portal provide a hub of digital engagement, complimented by our comprehensive social media strategy. Prospective and current students and alumni all feel more connected to Bridgewater State University because of these efforts within Student Affairs and Enrollment Management.

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JERRET LEMAY

Registrar,
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Jerret LeMay is registrar at State University of New York (SUNY) Oswego and project manager for SUNY's Transfer Finder initiative, which facilitates seamless student transfer among SUNY institutions. He has served on multiple customer advisory boards and development partner groups for higher education technology.

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As registrar at the Oswego campus of the State University of New York (SUNY), Jerret LeMay is proud of the way his office and team are already improving student success, and he expects that success to only grow over time. "The way I see it, the first step toward good student service is to make sure your administrative functioning is in good order," says LeMay. "Are you setting up processes that are going to avoid problems? If there are problems, are you identifying them before anybody else notices? If you do identify them, can you remediate them? All these things really happen on the administrative side long before a student needs to pick up the phone, send out an email, or walk into the office."

Providing a high level of student service at SUNY Oswego is still a bit of an art, with many "old-fashioned" techniques still deployed to personalize student communications and guidance—the sort of customization that comes from experience and can be difficult to institutionalize through technology. With more than 8,000 students at Oswego alone and 64 campuses making SUNY one of the largest higher education systems in the country, technology plays a major role in improving both student experience and graduation rates. For LeMay, two initiatives stand out as particularly notable. ⟩⟩⟩

KEY LESSONS

1 Deploying a degree-planning solution is the first step in helping students make good choices and see the most efficient road maps to their academic goals.

2 A system-wide solution that allows transfer students the ability to compare various inter-institution programs greatly improves student options and reduces issues.

> " *The first step toward good student service is to make sure your administrative functioning is in good order.* "

The first, which was implemented two years ago on a limited basis and is now being rolled out more widely, allows students to create a unique education plan. "We really started to get into student educational planning in terms of providing electronic templates for students when they walk in the front door," says LeMay. "These plans lay out academic programs in a way that not only helps students stay on track and take some of the guesswork out of the prerequisite structure but also see courses that are actually going to be offered." Working with an advisor, students map out what their time at SUNY Oswego should look like, and experience demonstrates that having an upfront plan leads to greater success and higher graduation rates.

By mining the student plan data, university administrators can schedule course offerings more tightly to meet demand. Thanks to a good interface between Oswego's registration system and its degree auditing and tracking software, there is less confusion between what advisors have recommend for students in their plan and the courses being offered at a given time. "We know that students who use our planning templates avoid prerequisite errors to a much greater degree," points out LeMay. "We know that they also run into fewer major or minor restrictions and our registration system also provides a visual layout for the calendar that helps students avoid time conflict errors. We know that all those errors happen at a much lower rate than for the general student population."

The second initiative that excites LeMay is the transfer finder capabilities in its degree-planning tool that allow a student at any SUNY institution to sit down and essentially run a what-if scenario against any other SUNY institution. "That is a really powerful tool because if you are at a two-year institution and you're targeting multiple programs at multiple SUNY campuses, you can know while you're still taking courses at the community college exactly what the requirements are at your destination four-year institution," says LeMay, who manages the project for the entire SUNY system. "You can make choices during those first two years that will put you in a better position when you do transfer to the four-year institution. In doing that, you can avoid a lot of troubles along the way." ■

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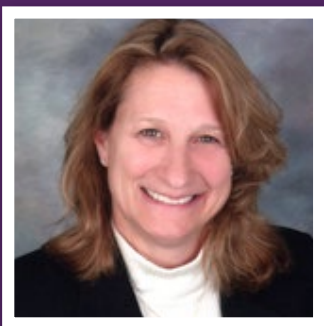
DEBORAH LUDFORD

District Director, Information Services,
North Orange County Community College District

Deborah Ludford worked for 10 years in the private sector before leaving to become a professor of computer science and information systems. She has since been president of the academic senate and chief information systems officer at two colleges, is past president of the Chief Information Systems Officers Association for California Community Colleges, is treasurer of the CCC Banner User's Group, and is a board member of CENIC. Currently, Deborah is district director, Information Services, at North Orange County Community College District.

🌐
Website

In her position as district director of Information Services at one of California's leading community colleges, Deborah Ludford understands the challenges of building long-term solutions that address student needs holistically. Despite a budgeting process that sometimes favors short-term answers, she and her team have recently initiated seven specific technology programs that improve student access and service over time. Ludford points to three of these programs (education planning, customer relationship management, and assessment), as the most promising, and the ones that have her most excited about the future.

Education Planning

"Research shows that students who develop a formal education plan early on and who enjoy early successes in their coursework, particularly in math and English, are more likely to persist and complete their degree," says Ludford. "Such an outcome requires monitoring success, completion, and retention on a regular basis across the entire system." The North Orange County Community College District began implementing online tools and technology to deliver its orientation process. ⟫⟫

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KEY LESSONS

1 Educational technology that follows students throughout the entire higher education lifecycle helps boost student success and identify potential obstacles.

2 Intercepting students' behavior early, both good and bad, is one of the most effective ways to keep them in the system and help them graduate with their degree of choice.

"Students can go into the system and—based on who they are and what they're interested in—they get a 'tree structure' set of questions," Ludford explains. "Depending on how the students answer these questions, they get a specific set of additional materials to complete (for example, for international students or students with disabilities or special needs). The carrot for completing this process and submitting an education plan before enrollment is that the student gets priority at registration."

Customer Relationship Management

The North Orange County Community College District also uses a customer relationship management (CRM) system system to identify students who may be at risk, says Ludford. The CRM system monitors the student and can identify when he or she is potentially in trouble. Then, a counselor does an intervention to see what the cause might be and whether a new education plan is in order for that student.

"We're trying to be proactive as we work with students," says Ludford, who explains this goes beyond an early alert program. "It's holistically looking to see whether students are progressing," she says. "If they're not, then we identify that and try to intervene because it's far better for us to keep students who are already in the system and get them through rather than lose them, and then have them come back into the system later and start over. We can also use that same system to look at students who are doing well," she says. "We can send them an email to say, 'Hey, you're doing awesome. Keep up the good work.'" 〉〉〉

> " *We have found in our system that it's the personal touch which is most effective. If students feel that somebody cares about them on the campus, and cares about their success, then they are more likely to succeed.* "

The CRM system encourages teachers, counselors and administration to all be involved in managing a student's progress and provides a single platform to assure consistency, transparency, and accuracy. "We're using it on all fronts to try to keep students involved," says Ludford, "persistently following up with them because what we found in our system is that it's the personal touch which is most effective. If students feel that somebody cares about them on the campus, and cares about their success, then they're more likely to succeed."

Assessment

"Another important thing that we do is assessment," says Ludford. "We have a statewide initiative, and now the state is building tools so that soon no matter where you're assessed in the state, you can move from institution to institution and your assessment results will follow you." The North Orange County Community College has had many of these programs in place for years. Now that they're being implemented statewide, the collective results will be even more helpful to students.

"The other thing we've done," she says, "is move to a model of what we call *multiple measures*. Multiple measures say that no single assessment can determine where you're likely to be placed because a single assessment isn't that accurate or reliable. So now, we look at students more holistically—high school graduation rate, the courses they took and how they did in them, and any work they may have done at another community college. Then, we add in the assessment, trying to place each student in the highest-level class for which he or she qualifies. A single assessment just doesn't do that." ◼

> *Student success today demands an immersive, wraparound experience for the student to ensure they're attracted to the institution and consider it their institution of choice, that they remain engaged, that they're driven to graduate and that they're prepared to transition seamlessly into their career of choice.*

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CHRISTY RIDDLE

Executive Director, Student Success Center,
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Dr. Christy Riddle has 19 years of experience in higher education and provides leadership to Delta State University's Student Success Center, in Cleveland, Miss. The Center includes five divisions: academic advising, academic support, first year seminar, international student services, and Okra Scholars, a *First in the World* project supported by a major grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education. She earned a Ph.D. in Human Capital Development from the University of Southern Mississippi.

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Stay Okra Strong. Dr. Christy Riddle, executive director of the Student Success Center at Delta State University (DSU), says that this motto is the center of the retention-related technology advances on her campus. The Fighting Okra is DSU's unofficial mascot, chosen because okra is a hard, prickly vegetable that has strong roots and stems. Shortened, the saying becomes *SOS*, an early alert when students struggle and might need a little extra help. "Anyone can alert someone. So, for example, if a student has missed three classes, a faculty member can submit an alert. Our SOS coordinator receives the alert, and then, depending on what the SOS is, determines how to follow up," Riddle says.

The system started as a barebones Microsoft Excel–powered method to track student performance in an effort to improve retention and completion rates. "Our success rate with SOS right now is about 65 to 70 percent," Riddle says. It is a time-consuming process, however, because it is entirely manual. »

> " *The new system will enhance the efforts of academic advisors by providing readily available online data regarding their advisees, expand the tracking and monitoring capabilities of the Student Success team, and streamline campus-wide retention efforts.*

KEY LESSONS

1 Using technology to automate early alert systems can help increase retention and completion rates.

2 Patience and a thorough understanding of the institution's needs are key when implementing a student success/advisement application.

SOS is one initiative that's helping increase the retention of DSU students. Since the launch of the Student Success Center in Fall 2012, Riddle's team has seen solid indicators that campuswide efforts are paying off. "This fall, our fall-to-fall retention rate is up 5.2 percent from the previous fall for first-time, full-time freshmen, and 7.8 percent for first-time, full-time transfer students."

That is good news for DSU as the university pilots Ellucian CRM Advise, a new success and retention application—an application that will improve on the university's overall retention efforts. The new technology will not only allow better SOS tracking but expand capabilities. "In addition to automating the early alert program, the new system will enhance the efforts of academic advisors by providing readily available online data regarding their advisees, expand the tracking and monitoring capabilities of the Student Success team, and streamline campuswide retention efforts," says Riddle.

Riddle says the process has underscored the importance of patience. "It takes time because this program is customized for DSU. It's not off the shelf, with stock templates. Everything is customized." To have that level of customization, she says it is essential to have a good partner that takes the time to understand your needs. She also suggests finding on campus champions who can help guide the process. "We piloted the system in fall 2016, with the faculty academic advisors in the College of Education and Human Sciences, with two faculty members taking the lead on implementing the technology. This group of faculty has been instrumental in shaping the product for the rest of the campus as we go campuswide in spring 2017."

"Technology is vital," Riddle says. "We get anywhere from 150 to 250 SOS alerts a semester, and benchmarking it is a constant challenge. We don't currently have an automated process, so we are looking forward to fully implementing Ellucian's product. The manual process has been gruesome, but I think it's been really beneficial to start off that way because now we're creating the capabilities we *know* we need." ■

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RICHARD SLUDER

Vice Provost for Student Success and Dean, University College, Middle Tennessee State University

Richard Sluder is vice provost for Student Success and Dean of University College. He leads Middle Tennessee State University's Quest for Student Success, which includes transforming advising by integrating predictive analytics, course redesign, and tutoring initiatives. As dean, he oversees work with undecided students, adult degree completion, online learning, summer sessions, and academic outreach to high school students. Richard has 22 years of prior experience at the University of Central Missouri as vice provost, dean, and faculty member.

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Richard Sluder, vice provost for student success and the dean of University College at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), joined the university in 2014 shortly after it implemented a new program called *Quest for Student Success*. The university hired 47 new advisors and implemented an advising platform with predictive analytics.

The system enables an intuitive, institutionwide view of students, which is also user-friendly. "We can consult the system and get a picture of a student quickly," Sluder says. "The platform gives you student information on one side." On the other side, Sluder says the institution has access to all the tools and analytics necessary for helping students achieve success.

"It's also a platform from which to conduct outreach, so we can filter and sort and search for basically any group of students, and then communicate with them through the platform," Sluder says. He explains, "If I'm an advisor and I have a caseload of 300 students, I can search and filter within seconds to identify all the first-year students who have less than a C average in any course at midterm."

> " *I can search and filter within seconds to identify all the first-year students who have less than a C average in any course at midterm. Then, I can communicate with those students to ask them to come in, set up appointments.*

KEY LESSONS

1 **Technology integrated across the institution allows advisors to track and monitor student achievement and progress and respond to potential challenges to ensure that student retention and completion remain high.**

2 **Student success starts with invested leaders and becomes part of the institutional culture, from registration through graduation.**

"Then, I can communicate with those students to ask them to come in, set up appointments. The possibilities are endless when we can identify students based on different criteria."

The tool that Sluder uses is a full-service advising tool, so it also has many other features that help track and communicate with students to ensure their success. For example, he says, "It gives us the ability to do risk prediction—to identify those students who are at risk, conduct the outreach, draw them in, and then drive them toward services so that they can get help before it's too late." Such a system would also allow MTSU to identify high-performing students as well, making it possible to open increased access to further opportunities for these students.

Sluder points out that the success of the deployment hinges on user adoption. "Accessing the technology is a first step," he says. "Getting people to use it is really the beginning. Many places have the finest technology available, but it's not used across the institution. Our whole philosophy here when we brought the technology in was that *not* using the tools really wasn't an option. It's an expectation that everybody uses the tools."

Another key to making the most of technology, says Sluder, is getting leadership buy-in. "You need key leadership to endorse it—not just talking about the tool being a strategic priority but making it the number one priority and part of everything we do." In fact, Sluder says that buy-in is part of a formula for success that he calls a *70/30 principle*. "It's 70 percent people, 15 percent technology, and 15 percent process. The magic is in putting those elements together to work in a particular way to get the outcomes you desire." 〉〉〉

> " *It's 70 percent people, 15 percent technology, and 15 percent process. The magic is in putting those elements together to work in a particular way to get the outcomes you desire.* "

To benchmark success, Sluder suggests choosing specific areas that are important to your institution, and then following those initiatives over time. "We talk about a limited number of strategic priorities. We see institutions that are doing a million things because they're big and there's a lot of stuff going on. We've been very careful to say, 'These are the key strategic priorities that we're focused on.' We publish them; we keep going back to them. We make sure those are the things we're paying attention to. We're not spread a mile wide and an inch deep."

The technology and philosophy seem to be working. MTSU has seen a freshmen retention rate increase from 68 percent in 2013 to 76 percent as of fall 2016. "If we'd just hired new advisors and let them do work the old way, we'd have a system that wouldn't make much difference. It's really about the transformation to using data in an analytics platform to structure work strategically so that we can assist the students who need that assistance most." ∎

The growing focus on student success in higher education has been one of the most encouraging and inspiring developments I've witnessed over the last few years. I appreciate the importance of research for some institutions, but schools still ultimately exist to serve students.

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Dr. Diana G. Oblinger is President Emeritus of EDUCAUSE, a nonprofit association of 2,400 colleges, universities, and education organizations whose mission is to advance higher education through the use of information technology. Previously, Oblinger held positions in academia and business, including the University of North Carolina system, IBM, and Microsoft. She is known for her leadership in information technology, particularly its impact on enhancing learning and improving college readiness and completion. Oblinger has received outstanding teaching and research awards and holds three honorary degrees. She currently serves on the Board of Directors of Ellucian.

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Diana Oblinger says that the technology around student success has come a long way. "Twenty years ago, the 'technology' that we used were called *one-stop centers*," she explains. "They were physical places. Before one-stop centers, students had to hopscotch across campus trying to find an office for this, an office for that." Today, Oblinger says, technology does the integration. For example, rather than having to go to the registrar's office, an advisor's office, and the financial aid office, those services are accessible online.

"Now we've moved into an era where we're using analytics to increase student success—things like predictive analytics and early alerts let students know where they stand and what their options are. 'Nudges' remind students of things that they can do to enhance their performance or give them a pat on the back for what they've achieved. All this hinges on thinking about the student's life holistically rather than where an office is located on campus. As good as technology is today, our understanding of students and how to support their success will continue to evolve." ⟫⟫

KEY LESSONS

1 Using technology to increase student success requires that you first understand your students and their needs. Only by taking a holistic view of each student can institutions truly implement technologies for student success.

2 Technology is evolving. To achieve long-term success through technology solutions, it's essential to look foward and envision the technological needs of the future.

> " *With student success systems, institutions are making higher education's processes more transparent so that students can see where they are; where they're going; and, what they might need to do if they choose a different path.* "

"Much of the evolution of student success is about transparency," Oblinger explains. "Students often don't see clear pathways, guidelines, or milestones. With student success systems, institutions are making higher education's processes more transparent so that students can see where they are, where they're going, and what they might need to do if they choose a different path." An added benefit, Oblinger says, is that students can see what's possible. "Today's student success tools help students select majors, choose careers, anticipate how long it will take them to get their degree, and better understand the labor market. Those are important elements of a college-to-career pathway."

Oblinger points out that while student success initiatives are maturing, some challenges still exist. "Student success a few years ago wasn't talked about as much as it is today. A common stumbling block is just defining what 'student success' means to your students and your institution and how you get there." She points to other challenges, as well. "One is having the technology in place to implement these student success systems. You've got to have good data and analytical tools. In addition, institutions have to work through data-governance and policy issues." Whether technology or policy, the issues can be complicated, Oblinger says.

Oblinger continues, "Funding is always a stumbling block for any kind of major initiative. You need resources not just for technology but also for professional development. People need to know how to use the tools. A tool is only as good as the people who use it."

Despite the challenges, Oblinger believes that institutions can use technology to achieve greater success. "Student success and the systems that support it will continue to morph and grow stronger because we know more, we have more technological tools, and we have a greater understanding of students. Now more than ever we need to ensure that students are successful. It isn't a one-size-fits-all solution, nor is it a one-time approach. We owe it to ourselves, our students, and society to help students be successful." ∎

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