



Campuses Emerging Stronger

Now that faculty, staff and students have a taste of remote work and learning, it can never entirely go away. Here's why.

HIGHER EDUCATION IS AT A CROSSROADS. In one direction, students are increasingly questioning the cost of getting their degrees and the value of their investments, even as a college education has proven over and over to be **financially beneficial**. A survey published earlier this year by **Third Way and New America** found that nearly six in 10 students (57%) agreed that college “is not worth the cost” – up from 49% in August. A big part of the problem was staying motivated to learn, mentioned by 60% in the same survey, no doubt exacerbated by too many anemic remote learning experiences over the last year.

It doesn't help that some of the same serious challenges hitting institutions before COVID-19 continue to linger. Pre-pandemic, along with a declining population of high school graduates and shrinking international enrollment, six-year degree **completion** hovered around just 68% at public four-year institutions; the outcomes were worse (42% and 54%, respectively). Now, **enrollments have dipped** by 3% over last spring, and the decline is nearly 10% for community colleges, serving as an indicator that we may see accelerating drops as the number of students in those feeder schools shrinks.

And yet, in another direction, some colleges and universities are poised to emerge from the pandemic stronger than they went in. In large part, they have used the last year to accelerate adoption of online education where it makes sense, keeping the physical classroom time dedicated to experiential forms of learning.



As a **McKinsey report** noted, “Remote and online learning are here to stay. The need is to determine what combination of remote and in-person learning delivers the highest educational quality and equity. As institutions refine this hybrid model, they have a once-in-a-generation chance to reconfigure their use of physical and virtual space.”

Success requires a combination of favorable conditions:

- Rethinking how institutions address student services and support to make delivery more sustainable and the processes more efficient, effective and engaging;
- Strengthening research operations to keep up with a tidal wave of COVID-19-related research opportunities;
- Delivering an industry-grade learning experience to students no matter where they're working and what equipment they have access to; and
- Embedding a cybersecurity culture into every corner of the campus to make data and information impenetrable to those unauthorized to access it.

Technology to Expand on the Institutional Mission

A theme in each of these conditions is the need to understand what the IT infrastructure can support and how well it's holding up as institutional demands ebb and flow.

A Campus Technology “pulse survey” among IT leaders and professionals found that while the impact of remote learning and work made their jobs harder rather than easier (by 11 percentage points), the outcomes have been worth the effort. Four times as many participants agreed than disagreed that their organization's response to the pandemic was improving the way they deliver services to students, faculty and staff. And more than 7 in 10 respondents (71%) reported that they considered the majority of their students “satisfied” with the IT services.

The areas that have needed the most attention during the pandemic probably wouldn't surprise anybody, starting with updates in IT support, cited by 55% of institutions. That was followed closely by three other categories of technology:

- VPN/remote access, mentioned by 48% of respondents
- Wireless network (47%)
- Learning & collaboration software (46%)

A third of schools saw updates in their learning management systems (37%) and telecommunications (32%).

Campus Re-entry

Campus Technology • PULSE SURVEY

4x

as many respondents agreed than disagreed that COVID-19 improved IT service delivery



School tech updates made during the pandemic:

55%
IT support

48%
VPN/remote access

47%
Wireless networking

46%
Learning & collaboration software



7 in 10

IT professionals believe most students are satisfied with IT services they're receiving



The impact of remote work and learning on IT workers:

44% said it made work harder

33% said it made work easier



Source: Campus Technology

And just a quarter refreshed their cybersecurity tools (24%) and storage systems (23%) or saw new tools and practices applied to learning assessment (23%).

Navigating higher ed adaptation will continue to fall hard on the shoulders of IT. Fortunately, this is a campus unit that's well-suited to strategic innovation, even as it deals with tactical needs. Members of the IT organization were at the forefront in developing creative ways to outfit students with the devices and connectivity they needed when everybody was sent home. They've worked online one-on-one, in small groups and in large forums to make sure faculty were equipped and trained to teach remotely. They've hardened the systems for supporting a remote workforce. And they've responded to a number of

short-term actions linked to keeping the lights on and the school moving forward through the emergency.

Now IT is poised to help the university envision a future where technology can expand on the institutional mission: providing new ways to connect prospective students from under-represented groups with advisers and virtual campus tours; reaching deeper into the local K-12 community; streamlining credit transfer; bringing alumni and the wider community guest lectures and extension learning; developing hybrid study-abroad opportunities; and melding programs from multiple schools, bootcamps and massive open online courses.

As one college leader **declared**, technology is no longer "an either or... It's both."