



# A Keen Eye: Data Diving on Campus

The use of data doesn't have to end with enhancing student services. It can also address the needs of others on and off campus. Laying the groundwork requires expert guidance and the right technology.

**L**AST SPRING, COLLEGE ENROLLMENT SAW A drop of 3.5%, or 603,000 students – seven times worse than the decline that had occurred just a year earlier. For undergraduate students specifically, the falloff was 4.9%, or 727,000 students. And in community colleges, it was 9.5%, or 476,000 fewer students.

The **National Student Clearinghouse Research Center** pointed to the “persistent impact of COVID-19-related disruptions” to explain the erosion of enrollment. Among the oft-cited disruptions: Students don't like studying online; they may be dealing with financial barriers; their families may have health-related issues; or they're just delaying college, waiting for a better time to attend.

As a keeper of national college and university data, the NSC Research Center has a mission that it performs admirably well: to report on longitudinal data outcomes to

doesn't address insights about student experiences. Nor does it touch on that other part of the campus community: faculty, staff and administration. Even as schools are experiencing the Great Enrollment Decline, they're also facing the Great Resignation.

That's the challenge in working with existing sources of data using the same practices on which you've always relied: It can be too limited, too wide, out of date or off the mark for helping solve the most pressing issues. Plus, there's the continual problem of campus leaders and boards not looking forward, not recognizing the true urgency of their situations or not knowing where to turn for solutions.

## Gaining a Handle on User Experiences

A *Campus Technology* survey among readers found that while almost every college and university considered the use of data critical to institutional survival (84%), a minority of respondents believe their schools are very mature in applying data for practical uses. For example, while half of colleges (50%) have identified indicators of student success and use them regularly for decision-making, less than a third report that users can quickly and easily get the information they need (28%); have robust, secure or user-friendly tools for supporting data collection (29%); or have data experts available to guide users through their data needs (28%). Data governance councils exist in only 20% of respondent schools, and just 9% said their institutions have removed data siloes and integrated diverse data sources to gain insights.

In spite of the decades-long emphasis on adopting data to make better decisions, few institutions have exhibited progress towards their goals. What schools need is to have a better grasp of user experiences, which takes many forms.

In this special issue, a number of experts share their ideas for gaining more visibility on a myriad of fronts, leading to innovations that can make a difference to institutional success.

In “The Absolutely Essential Higher Ed Superpower,” you'll learn how gaining visibility into system data helps IT teams be more proactive, which can make all the difference in how effective they are.



Forward-thinking IT staff have learned that they don't have to go it alone. There are organizations and companies specializing in cybersecurity primed to help schools and districts formulate their response to the unique challenges they face. Many have hired top names with decades of K-12 leadership experience to influence the development of services and programs that will best serve the education segment specifically.

improve educational policy decisions. Therefore, its findings will by necessity be fairly broad. And, because its analysis is based on regular reporting done by each institution, the conclusions are, as *The Innovator's Dilemma* author Clayton Christensen would have put it, “backward looking.”

Other limitations exist as well. While the NCS Research Center offers trendlines for enrollments, transfers, mobility, completion rates and other outcomes for students, it

# Innovation in Higher Ed Begins with Data

Campus Technology • PULSE SURVEY



Source: Campus Technology

“Why Student Experience Matters” makes a case for institutions to add an experience management platform in their tech stack, right below the ever-present SIS and LMS.

In “It’s Time to Re-imagine Your Front Door,” a design expert suggests looking at how the biggest names in digital experiences solve the same challenges your college faces with its users.

“Seeking a Modern Search Experience” examines how the online user experience could be more effective, especially when it may be the only connection to your campus.

As “When Live Virtual Learning Really Works” explains, the best courses deliver collaborative learning experiences that engage and inspire learners. Your virtual learning platform can either help or hinder that pursuit.

No other segment will benefit more than education from automating routine processes, as “The Long Wait: Why

It’s Time for Higher Ed to Embrace Automation” explores.

Finally, as “Partnering for Smarter, More Efficient Purchasing” asserts, it doesn’t matter how innovative your campus wants to be. If it can’t get the right products and services when they’re needed at a price it can afford, those innovations will remain nothing more than good ideas.

## Achieving Amazing Outcomes

The practice of “data diving” on campus can have a lot of amazing outcomes. More students will show up and stick around; users’ experiences will be memorable in positive ways; employees will feel more job satisfaction, giving them pause when other opportunities arise; and innovation won’t be rushed by external forces (a.k.a. COVID-19) but introduced regularly as the normal order of operations, in response to what data is telling you.