

# Empowering student success: leveraging AI for enhanced engagement & retention



## The shifting landscape of higher education

Today's higher education institutions face unprecedented challenges in student engagement and retention. Beyond traditional academic hurdles, a complex web of evolving student needs and economic pressures demands innovative solutions. Our ability to adapt and provide targeted support is paramount to ensuring student success and institutional vitality.



### Understanding today's students & challenges

Today's student body is uniquely shaped by technological fluency, financial realities, and a growing focus on mental well-being. Understanding these core characteristics is the first step toward effective intervention.

#### Key characteristics of students today

Higher education students today exhibit a complex set of characteristics that institutions must understand to provide effective support. As digital natives, they expect seamless and personalized digital interactions in their educational experiences, favoring interactive and accessible learning styles. However, they are also increasingly burdened by debt due to the escalating costs of higher education, leading to significant financial stress that can impact their academic performance and persistence. The diverse backgrounds of students, encompassing various socio-economic statuses, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles, require institutions to implement inclusive and adaptable support systems. Despite being hyper-connected, many students report feelings of isolation or disengagement from their academic community, resulting in lower participation and increased dropout rates. Furthermore, while many students desire a strong sense of community, the opportunities or structures to foster deep connections are often lacking, contributing to feelings of detachment.

#### The growing mental health crisis

Higher education institutions are facing a growing mental health crisis among their students. The rates of mental health crises, including anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders, are alarmingly high, directly impacting academic performance and retention. Furthermore, institutions often struggle to meet the escalating demand for mental health services due to insufficient resources and a shortage of adequately trained staff. The prevalence of burnout, fueled by academic pressures, personal stressors, and part-time jobs, is also widespread, leading to exhaustion and a diminished capacity to learn.

#### Economic realities affecting education

Higher education institutions are facing significant economic challenges. Federal funding and other revenue streams are often stagnant or decreasing, forcing institutions to operate with reduced budgets. The situation is further complicated by rising operational costs due to inflation, which affects everything from utilities to supplies, and increasing labor costs resulting from higher salaries and benefits for faculty and staff. These financial pressures strain institutional budgets, often limiting their ability to expand crucial student support services.



## The role of technology & AI in engagement & retention

### Current Technology Support Landscape

The current technology support landscape in higher education is characterized by a complex array of disparate platforms that often lack seamless integration, hindering effective AI deployment. The rapid evolution of educational technology necessitates constant evaluation and adaptation to ensure that tools remain effective and integrated. To address these challenges, institutions must transition to or fully leverage comprehensive modern platforms, such as Workday Student, Ellucian Banner, and Salesforce, which can create a robust ecosystem for student support when properly integrated, enabling better data aggregation and AI functionality.

### Proposed AI interventions for enhanced engagement

AI is not a replacement for human connection, but rather a powerful enabler that can augment staff capabilities, provide proactive support, and personalize the student experience at scale. By analyzing student data, AI can facilitate personalized connection strategies, understanding individual learning styles, communication preferences, and areas of struggle to deliver tailored outreach and resources. This can include customized course recommendations and academic advising, enhancing the overall student experience.

AI can also be utilized to develop early warning and recovery systems, identifying patterns in academic performance, attendance, and engagement to flag students at risk of disengagement or failure. This allows for timely human intervention and support, potentially preventing crises. Additionally, AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can handle routine inquiries, freeing up staff time to focus on complex student needs that require personal attention.

Moreover, AI can proactively identify students struggling with mental health issues, financial problems, or social isolation by analyzing broader data points, enabling targeted outreach from counselors and support staff. Finally, AI can improve equity and access to support resources, democratizing access to information and ensuring that all students have timely access to the resources they need, regardless of their background or location. This helps bridge gaps in service delivery, promoting a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

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## Partnering for success

We help empower higher education institutions to navigate this evolving landscape by strategically leveraging technology and data.

Our expertise helps you implement sustainable solutions that enhance student outcomes.

### Strategic evaluation & optimization

Strategic evaluation and optimization involve a comprehensive assessment of an institution's current technological infrastructure to identify its strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for integration and improvement. Additionally, support is provided for complex technology implementations, ensuring efficient resource allocation and successful project delivery, particularly for large and costly projects. This enables institutions to optimize their technology investments and achieve their goals more effectively.

### Capacity building & knowledge transfer

To build capacity and facilitate knowledge transfer, training and workshops are provided to equip staff with the necessary skills to effectively utilize new technologies. Additionally, these workshops focus on identifying and securing funding opportunities for technological advancements, enabling institutions to stay up-to-date with the latest developments.

### Leveraging emerging technologies

Institutions can leverage emerging technologies through collaborative exploratory technology initiatives that pilot and implement cutting-edge solutions, ensuring they remain at the forefront of innovation in student support.

By strategically embracing AI and modern technological solutions, institutions can move beyond reactive support to create a proactive, personalized, and equitable environment that truly fosters student engagement and drives retention. Partner with us to build a resilient and thriving future for your students and your institution.

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