



New Student Onboarding Diagnostic

What First Impression Does Your College Make?

Student Success
Collaborative
Navigate



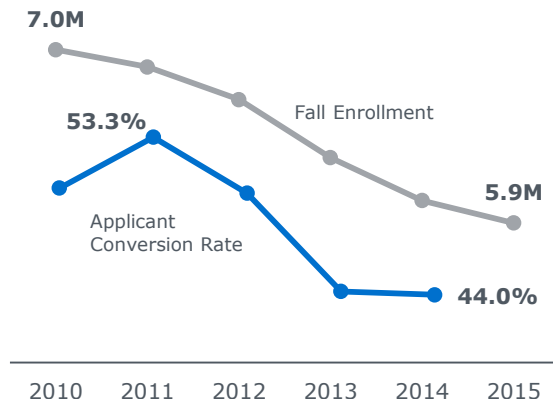
Executive Overview

Appreciating the Challenge

Over the past decade, more students have entered community college with remedial needs, applied for financial aid, and enrolled in college after years away from a formal educational setting, resulting in greater demands on college resources to assist students navigating the enrollment process. In the absence of sufficient support to meet this demand, admitted students attempting to enroll in courses make critical academic decisions alone, or drop out of the enrollment pipeline altogether.

Applicant Attrition Rates Reveal Chaotic Intake Process at Two-Year Colleges

From 2011 to 2014, two-year colleges lost more than half of all prospective students between application and the first day of the fall term. In the fall of 2014, community colleges converted only 44% of all applicants into enrollees at their institutions—a 56% attrition rate before the semester even began. The impact of this attrition is exacerbated by declining enrollment numbers across the two-year college sector; some college leaders have likened their enrollment trends over the past decade as cutting smaller pieces of a shrinking pie.



Too Many Administrative Obstacles in Student Intake and Registration Process

To understand the student experience, EAB researchers have visited over 50 community colleges across more than 20 states. Each campus was unique from the next—onsite observations took place in rural, urban, and suburban settings at institutions of various sizes, cultures, and demographic makeups. The only constant across these visits was our steadfast adoption of the new student perspective. Despite vast experience in higher education, members of the research team approached each campus as a new student would by relying on campus signage, student advice, and staff instructions to guide us from start to finish. In a few instances, research team members were able to register for classes. However, in the majority of onsite visits, campus policies and procedures prevented such progress.

Structural and Strategic Changes Needed to Boost Conversion Rates

Despite efforts to improve customer service and create more welcoming environments, community colleges still require students to navigate complex processes and policies. Mazes of offices, forms, and confusing jargon can discourage students and delay their progress toward enrollment.

To help students enroll more easily, colleges must change their structure and strategies to reduce student effort during intake.

56%
applicants lost
before Day One¹

2.5x
Odds of attrition
without academic
plan in place

1 in 6
First term drop out
due to scheduling
conflicts

62%
Students reporting
advising needs not
met in college

1) EAB data analysis across 156 two-year public community colleges for which application and enrollment data is available.

Source: Trends in College Pricing 2014, College Board; National Center for Education Statistics, Accessed December 2015; American Association of Community Colleges, "Community College Completion: Progress toward goal of 50% increase," May 2015; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Signature Reports No. 4, 6, 8, and 10; EAB interviews and analysis.

Executive Overview (cont.)

Framing the Ambition

In an era of declining enrollments and heightened competition, community college leaders must focus on optimizing intake for incoming students by smoothing their path to enrollment and completion in a holistic manner, which includes both back-end administration and front-end student experience details. When facing the challenges described on the preceding page, however, many schools have responded with pilot programs and tweaks to existing strategies, failing to address shared challenges through innovation at scale.

There is, however, another way. The most progressive institutions we've worked with have built (and rebuilt, when necessary) their enrollment processes on the basis of a more comprehensive vision of the student experience during onboarding and beyond. This requires understanding the key dropout culprits across community colleges nationally, evaluating the extent of these barriers at the college, and adopting best-in-class strategies for a truly student-centered success enterprise that begins from the first few touchpoints during enrollment and continues through to graduation. Some common guiding principles are outlined below.

▶ **Simplifying Onboarding Steps to Speed Progress to Enrollment**

Research shows that today's consumers are just as comfortable going online to self-serve as they are seeking live help from a professional. However, new community college students often face numerous obstacles when attempting to self-serve during onboarding: unexpected delays, crowded websites, confusing jargon, and a stream of interdepartmental transfers. Colleges must instead simplify and streamline the intake process so that students willing to self-serve are able to do so, and enable advisors to provide more personalized support to those who need it.

▶ **Providing Personalized Guidance at Scale**

The typical new student has little time and only fragmented support when making critical decisions at intake. Despite advisors' best efforts, managing a caseload of hundreds, if not thousands, of students makes it impossible to provide quality guidance to so many students during peak registration. Instead, advisors should seek methods of scaling their support to help students select a degree program, first term schedule, and build a long-term academic plan.

▶ **Directing Students to Available Support Resources**

Community colleges serve a large and growing population of students with many risk factors (e.g., employed, family caregiver, low-income, etc.). Unfortunately, competing demands often converge at the same time, disrupting students' educational plans. To minimize attrition, leaders must align campus services to connect students with the right support at the right time.

▶ **Fostering Meaningful Connections Between Students and Advisors**

Given the wealth of information academic advisors and faculty advisors can provide, it is imperative that students feel comfortable seeking and receiving help from staff on campus. One way of fostering this relationship is ensuring smooth channels of communication and information between students and the multitude of staff and support resources on campus.

“We’ve had this conversation for twenty years at community colleges, and spent billions of dollars on initiatives that focus on sub-populations of sub-populations. This is never going to move the student success needle forward. We must start thinking about scaling success efforts.”

President, PA Community College

“In the beginning of the semester there is so much chaos and a lot of people don’t know what to do next. Usually after you apply to a school you’re on your own. It’s really scary to be making all these decisions without any help – I guess I expected more help from the school.”

Community College Student

New Student Onboarding Diagnostic

Using the Diagnostic

This diagnostic tool is designed to help you evaluate the new student onboarding experience at your institution, relative to the student-centered best-practice approach described on the preceding page. The focus throughout is on the avoidance of onboarding ‘pain points’, as well as the administrative details that can help you deliver a best-in-class experience leveraging the strengths of your staff.

The diagnostic is structured according to four core aspects of onboarding, each with a set of criteria listed. Rate your current capabilities according to each criteria, with a simple “yes/no” answer, and tally the results at the end of the survey. A key is offered there, to help you interpret your score.

	Yes	No
1. Simplifying Onboarding Steps		
New campus visitors are able to quickly find the correct starting point for application without asking for help		
New online visitors to our website can quickly find the correct link to begin an application in 60 seconds or less		
Our college allows students to progress through enrollment steps without delay		
We track where students are in the enrollment process and provide sequential information on next-steps		
We alert students immediately when enrollment steps may change due to special status (e.g., veteran status) or milestones achieved		
Our online and print materials are written in plain language that is easy for students to understand (Scoring a Gunning-Fog Index score of 8-10)		
Our students know exactly who to ask when they need onboarding help <i>and</i> the best way to reach them (e.g., phone, email, text message, etc.)		
All new students are encouraged (or required) to attend an orientation session that reviews basic college policies and introduces technologies		
New students must only visit one staff person on our campus to resolve issues with their enrollment		
Total “yes” responses		

	Yes	No
2. Providing Personalized Guidance at Scale		
Our academic programs are arranged by broad meta-major clusters		
New students at our college must complete career exploration activities		
We offer academic program recommendations based on students’ goals, skills, and interests at intake		
We provide students with a suggested list of courses to take in the first term		
We allow students to register for multiple terms at one time		
Our students can create a term schedule without advisor support		
We offer in-person support and computer lab space for students filling out the FAFSA form		
Our students receive reminders about next-steps in the financial aid process		
New students at our college know about available financial resources, including federal aid, grants, scholarships, and public benefits		
Our college offers debt management workshops for borrowers to recognize the risks of excessive debt		
Our summer scholarship program encourages part-time students to complete 30 credits per year and stay on-track for timely graduation		
Total “yes” responses		

New Student Onboarding Diagnostic (cont.)

	Yes	No
3. Directing Students to Support Resources		
Students can view a comprehensive list of all available academic supports, non-academic services, clubs, and extracurricular activities in one place		
All support resources are categorized and presented to students in a clear way to simplify choice and encourage participation		
Staff across the institution have audited academic and non-academic support resources to determine which type of students would benefit most		
We collect non-academic information about students during intake to understand their goals and interests		
Our college recommends specific support resources to students based on students needs and interests		
Students who place into pre-college math or English courses are directed to study materials for retesting		
We leverage behavioral economic insights to encourage students to take advantage of campus resources		
Total "yes" responses		

	Yes	No
4. Connecting Students and Advisors		
Advisors can access students' enrollment information, academic performance, and behavioral 'flags' in one unified technology platform		
Advisors can create 'campaigns' to send personalized mass messages to students based on administrative, academic, or custom attributes		
Advisors at our college can communicate with students via email, phone, or text message		
Advisors can track student open and response rates to emails to determine whether follow-up is needed		
Staff across campus can easily create notes or issue alerts about student risk factors that may impede success		
Total "yes" responses		

	Yes	No
5. Coordinating Onboarding Operations		
Our college tracks student scheduling preferences to optimize future course offerings by day and time		
We track student services utilization to optimize how our resources (e.g., staff time) are deployed during peak registration periods		
Our college tracks and aggregates student population trends to ensure all students have an optimal enrollment experience and enter the college on a pathway to completion		
Administrators, staff, and faculty all support efforts to optimize new student onboarding at our college and understand their role in this effort		
Total "yes" responses		

Interpreting Your Results

From Individual Performance Categories to an Overall Assessment

Assessment Categories	Total 'Yes' Responses
1. Enabling Student Self-Service	
2. Supporting Optimal Financial Decisions	
3. Providing Academic Guidance at Scale	
4. Connecting Students to Advisors and On-Campus Resources	
Grand Total:	

Grand Total Score	Assessment
0-15	Your institution has yet to implement many or most of the practices we've found to drive exceptional enrollment results. This suggests the potential for large, rapid performance improvements.
16-25	Your institution is functioning at a high level but is missing significant opportunities associated with best practices not yet implemented. Significant room for improvement on results is likely.
26-36	Your institution is functioning at an unusually high standard. Further gains in performance are possible but will require high levels of focus and innovation to realize.

▶ Ready to Optimize New Student Onboarding at Your Institution?

Contact **Nicole DiBenedetto** at NDiBenedetto@eab.com to learn how EAB can help you deliver a best-in-class experience for students at your college. Leveraging research, technology, and change management consulting, our experts have transformed member colleges into student-centered enterprises seeing gains in enrollment and retention.

▶ Start with best practices research

- › Research Forums for presidents, provosts, chief business officers, and key academic and administrative leaders
- › At the core of all we do
- › Peer-tested best practices research
- › Answers to the most pressing issues

▶ Then hardwire those insights into your organization using our technology & services

Enrollment Management

Our **Royall & Company** division provides data-driven undergraduate and graduate solutions that target qualified prospective students; build relationships throughout the search, application, and yield process; and optimize financial aid resources.

Student Success

Members, including four- and two-year institutions, use the **Student Success Collaborative**[™] combination of analytics, interaction and workflow technology, and consulting to support, retain, and graduate more students.

Growth and Academic Operations

Our **Academic Performance Solutions** group partners with university academic and business leaders to help make smart resource trade-offs, improve academic efficiency, and grow academic program revenues.

1,100⁺

College and university members

10,000⁺

Research interviews per year

250M⁺

Course records in our student success analytic models

1.2B⁺

Student interactions

The best
practices are
the ones that
work for **you.**SM



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