Data Strategy Frustrations and Aspirations

How higher education leaders can achieve their data goals

EAB recently surveyed more than three hundred campus data leaders, users, and stewards about their hopes for data use on campus—and what's getting in the way. In our analysis, we uncovered a handful of recurring frustrations institutions encountered with their data, as well as several common goals they shared.

Frustrations

Lack of efficiency

What this might sound like:

"We're spending so much time on compliance and ad hoc report requests that there isn't time for strategy."

Survey Insight:

63% of higher ed analysts surveyed said their IT, IR, and BI teams **worked together Poorly or Somewhat effectively** across the full data lifecycle; only 10% said their teams worked together Very Well.

Unclear how to access relevant data
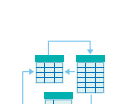
What this might sound like:

"Sometimes the data is there, but it isn't clear how to access it or what it includes."

Survey Insight:

Only 29% of System Administrators/Data Providers said their institution does Fairly Well or Very Well at managing data access; **21%** said their institutions **do not meet data access management objectives at all**.

Data not consistent

What this might sound like:

"It is a chore to pull any data out of any of our systems. And when we do, we can't trust the data. If two people pull a report, they will both get different numbers."

Survey Insight:

The average of 336 higher ed tech leaders surveyed rated their institution as merely **"somewhat" proficient in data quality assurance**.

Poor training and utilization practices

What this might sound like:

"Offices will run reports on data maintained by another office, without knowing how the data is used and defined by the office maintaining the data."

Survey Insight:

In response to the following statement, **65%** of survey respondents said their institutions performed Poorly or Not At All: "We have an established and clearly documented process for onboarding new stakeholders to the institution's data strategy."

Aspirations

A clear vision for data on campus

What this might sound like:

"We have five priorities as an institution, outlining how we're going to move forward. But we need to build an objective view of how we're delivering on them."

Survey Insight:

44% of survey respondents say their institutional leaders do Fairly or Very Well at recognizing data management as an important strategic initiative and dedicating resources to build solutions; however, only 17% of those respondents say their institution has a Fairly or Very good formal plan that communicates action steps to better leverage data. This represents a **27 percentage-point gap between recognition and formalized execution**.

Streamlined access to facilitate decisions

What this might sound like:

"Data should be the alpha and omega. It should be what tells us where to point our resources and whether we have accomplished what we want to accomplish."

Survey Insight:

Less than a quarter of survey respondents said their institutions rank **Fairly or Very Well at granting all stakeholders access to shared, enterprise data** from a single, centrally governed location. Centralized, well-governed data is a critical step toward streamlining access and enabling data-informed decision-making.

Sustainable governance and management

What this might sound like:

"It's not a one-time thing, it's not 'fix it and forget it'. It's like going to the doctor or the mechanic—our data needs to be constantly assessed and updated."

Survey Insight:

When asked whether their institutions' data strategy "**focuses on continuous improvement** and consistently prioritizes workloads to drive iterative strategic value," only **19%** of respondents rated their institutions as doing Fairly or Very Well.

Student success and equitable outcomes

What this might sound like:

"We need to be able to ensure we are providing personalized student support and replicating the student experiences that are positive. All of this requires access to reliable data."

Survey Insight:

33% of respondents rated their institution's performance as Fairly or Very Good on "**role-based data access to shared campus data set**s." Expanding access to trustworthy campus data is critical to personalizing student success efforts.

Achieve Your Data Goals: 10 Elements of Effective Data Management

Through our work with thousands of higher ed institutions, we've discovered ten core features of effective data management that can help you move past frustration and achieve your goals.

Organizational culture

1. **Strategic vision**
   Define your institution's goal for data use and set meausurable goals

2. **Data culture**
   Build a supportive and collaborative data infrastructure

3. **Data governance structures**
   Create security protocols to govern data access and usage

4. **Organizational continuity efforts**
   Develop systems and procedures to facilitate knowledge retention and mitigate the impact of turnover

5. **Collaboration framework**
   Implement technology and practices that allow staff to define and work toward common goals

Implementation Practices

6. **Implementation Strategy**
   Decide how your institution will put its strategic vision into practice

7. **Common Data Dictionary**
   Create shared definitions for each data field in your institution's CRMs, LMS, SIS, and databases

8. **Data Quality Assurance**
   Establish procedures and implement software to ensure that data remains standardized and trustworthy

9. **Data Access Management**
   Grant staff access to relevant data and restrict access based on security protocols

10. **Data Consumption**
    Measure and improve upon data usage and application across campus