

RESEARCH BRIEF

# From Stress to Success: Survey Insights to Empower Graduate Enrollment Teams

9 Key Findings from EAB and NAGAP's Surveys  
of Graduate Enrollment Leaders



# EAB Adult Learner Recruitment

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# Executive Overview

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## ▶ 9 Key Findings from Our Surveys of Graduate Enrollment Leaders

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To provide university leaders with additional insight into the complex graduate enrollment landscape, EAB has partnered with NAGAP to deploy a series of surveys of graduate enrollment leaders. Conducted between September 2022 and March 2023, the three surveys explored a variety of topics relevant to graduate enrollment leaders, from stress levels and job satisfaction to recruitment priorities and tactics. **This report compiles key findings from each of the three surveys to help enrollment leaders better understand the state of graduate enrollment management.**

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# Graduate Enrollment Teams Report Major Staffing Challenges

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PART

1

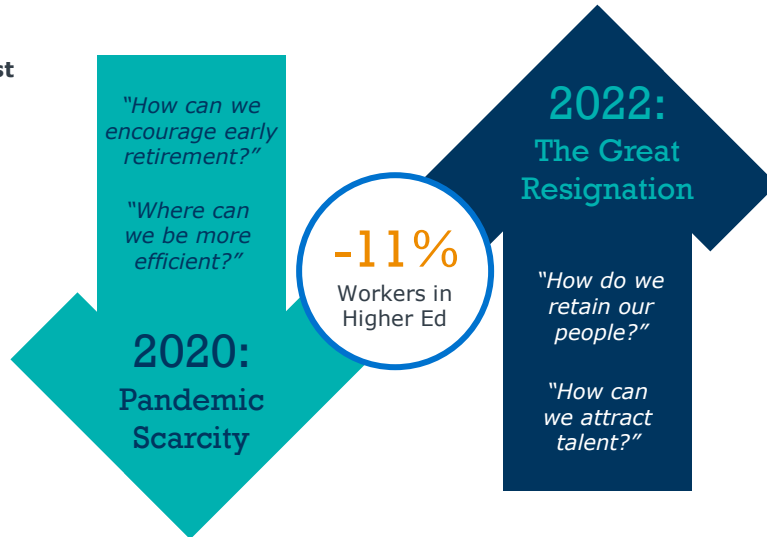
# Background on Higher Ed Staffing Challenges

## ► Pandemic Forces Give Higher Ed Whiplash

The pandemic placed immense pressure on higher ed to nimbly manage staffing. In the early days of the crisis, as many graduate schools were challenged to meet high revenue goals while also mitigating cost, staffing became a big piece of the cost-saving puzzle. To that end, some teams offered early retirement incentives or laid off members of their staff and focused attention on becoming more efficient.

### Labor as Our Biggest Cost Center

Focused on surviving early-pandemic revenue losses



### Labor as a Strategic Asset

Growing your institution in an era of labor shortage, inflation, and competition

However, with the Great Resignation, the script has been flipped. Schools now face a labor shortage and heightened competition for staff. Rather than offering incentives to retire, institutions must now offer compelling reasons for employees to stay or to join. EAB research indicates that a variety of factors contribute to current challenges in hiring and retaining staff, particularly in key positions.

## 5 Key Factors Account for a Vanishing Workforce:



Remote work has created a **national marketplace** for labor



The number of working-age people in the United States is **shrinking**

Projected deficit of 6 million workers nationally by 2028



Employees developed a taste for **flexible work** during the pandemic



Higher ed **lags industry** on compensation and flexible work



**Downward spiral** of worsening work conditions with staff resignations

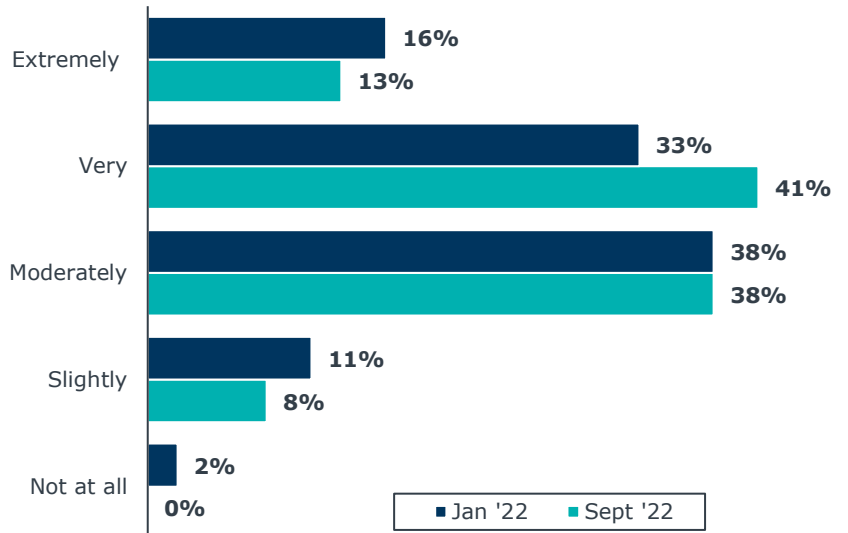
# Stress Levels Have Increased Since Early 2022

## ▶ The Majority of Graduate Enrollment Professionals Find Work Stressful

The pandemic brought unprecedented change, uncertainty, and elevated stress to higher ed. It is not surprising, then, that in January 2022, EAB and NAGAP’s survey found that 49% of graduate enrollment leaders were “very” or “extremely” stressed at work.

However, as we move further away from the pandemic, graduate enrollment leaders report feeling even more stressed than when we initially heard from them in early 2022. By September 2022, the percentage of respondents who felt very or extremely stressed at work increased by 5%, from 49% to 54%.

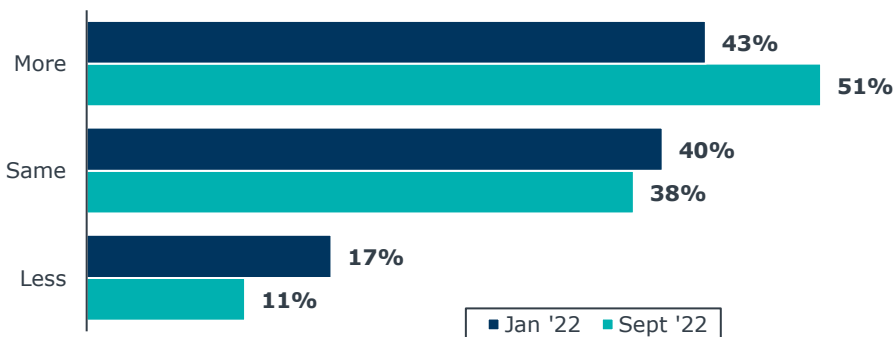
Generally, how stressful is your work situation?



## ▶ Stress Levels Increased Despite the Slowing of the Pandemic

In January 2022, 43% of respondents found their current work situation to be more stressful than in January of 2021—a time when most were still unvaccinated and locked down. In September 2022, when most had been fully vaccinated and had returned to in-person activity, over 50% of respondents (an increase of 8% since January) found their work situation to be more stressful than it was in September 2021. Given the diminishing anxiety surrounding the pandemic, one might assume less turbulent times, but the survey results show otherwise. To help university leaders understand how to best reduce stress and improve morale, this survey explored primary causes of discontent (see following page).

### How stressful is your current work situation compared with this time last year?



The pandemic hit my institution very hard: enrollment dropped 35% from fall 2019 to fall 2021. Our budgets were slashed and we lost positions. That has **made the recovery very difficult.**

Survey Respondent



## While Resources Are Low, Goals Remain High

### ► Top Workplace Stressors Are Understaffing and Heavier Workload

For the majority of graduate enrollment leaders, the top two stressors reported in January 2022 remained the top stressors in the fall (September 2022): unfilled staff positions and a heavier workload. At the same time, the percentage of respondents who reported health and safety as a stress factor declined by more than 50%, which is likely due to the falling number of serious COVID-19 cases. Zoom fatigue also declined by a significant amount, likely the result of more in-person activities and hybrid opportunities.

#### What factors are influencing the stressfulness of your current work situation?

(Select all that apply.)

	Jan '22	Sep '22
Unfilled staff positions	60%	57%
Heavier workload	60%	55%
Unrealistic goals	29%	<b>44%</b>
Low office morale	--	39%
Zoom fatigue	<b>52%</b>	24%
Lack of flexibility	21%	21%
Health/safety of colleagues, family, self	<b>48%</b>	19%
Caring for children/family	18%	17%
Conflict with/among co-workers	18%	17%
Pressure related to DEI	17%	15%
Concerns about job security	15%	15%
Physical work environment	19%	14%
Health/safety of students	<b>23%</b>	11%
Remote work challenges	9%	6%

68%

of respondents indicated in a separate question that they have one or more unfilled positions in their department, up from 61% reporting the same in January



There are **not enough people** to do the work. How do we keep up without creating a workplace that drives our existing staff to seek other, easier and more flexible jobs?

Survey Respondent

### ► Graduate Leaders Feel Increased Stress over Meeting Goals

It's also important to note that "unrealistic goals" was the third most frequently reported stress factor, named by almost one in two survey participants. This data is consistent with other EAB survey research, in which [51% of university leaders](#) reported that enrollment goals for their graduate and adult programs had increased since the start of the pandemic. As undergraduate enrollments suffered during the height of the pandemic, many institutions looked to graduate and adult-serving programs to make up revenue, setting ambitious goals that many graduate leaders were unable to meet.

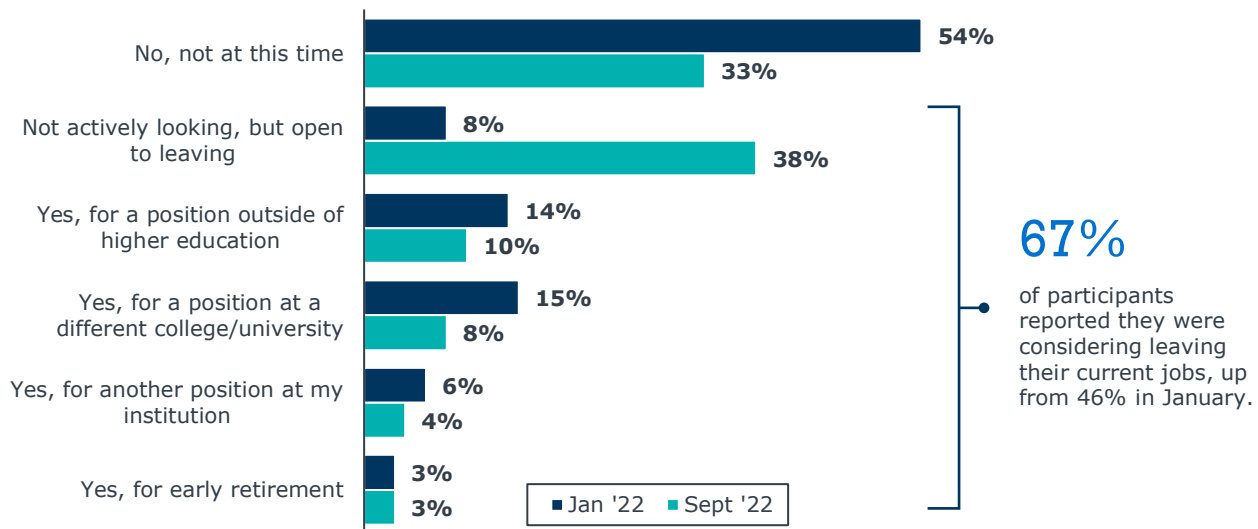


# Dissatisfaction Is Driving Increased Job-Searching

## ► Nearly Two-Thirds Are Considering Leaving Their Jobs

Over the past few years, employers across a variety of industries have been confronted with unusually high levels of resignation. This is especially true in the graduate enrollment space, where the struggle to retain employees continues to intensify. Within nine months, an additional 17% of graduate enrollment leaders reported they were considering leaving their current jobs, a trend that could further exacerbate the stress of having unfilled staff positions.

### Are you considering leaving your current position?



## ► Salary Continues to Be the Biggest Contributor to Discontent

Despite the high growth goals for graduate programs, [almost half of university leaders](#) surveyed stated they have not increased the budget for graduate programs since spring 2020, and 16% even decreased it. In addition, higher education salaries have long lagged behind those of other sectors. Under these conditions, and the added stressors of the pandemic, many graduate enrollment leaders are considering leaving higher education for a position with better pay—as well as less stress, better work-life balance, and more support from their organization.

### Why are you considering leaving higher education?

(Select up to two reasons.)

	Percentage
Better pay/benefits	50%
Less stress	35%
Better work-life balance	31%
More support from organization	31%
Ready for something new	27%
Fewer hours	2%

[I am] so exhausted and fearing I just **can't get all the things done** without sacrificing my personal life, health, etc.

Survey Respondent

# Strategies to Overcome Staffing Challenges

While this research illustrates that the majority of graduate enrollment teams face an especially challenging staffing climate, there are several approaches that university leaders can use to improve staffing conditions while also supporting graduate enrollment goals:



## Strategy #1: Reduce Staff Workload by Outsourcing Key Marketing Functions

Today's graduate enrollment teams are often facing pressure to meet high enrollment goals, even as staffing budgets are decreased. At the same time, students' expectations for marketing have continued to rise: they expect schools to deliver personalized messaging and to facilitate a self-service online research experience. Outsourcing marketing functions that require a high degree of expertise, specialization, or time can simultaneously reduce your staff's workload while expanding your capabilities and expertise.

To understand the competencies required to successfully compete in today's market, take our [enrollment capabilities self-assessment](#).



## Strategy #2: Make a Strong Case for Additional Budget

With one in two survey participants considering leaving for better pay, the urgency is clear. To convince university decision-makers that your graduate enrollment teams require additional budget for staffing, make a compelling and data-driven argument. To make a strong case, consider presenting data on the following topics: revenue generated by your staff, compensation benchmarks, current quit rate, market context on the staffing crisis, etc.

Explore our [goal-setting playbook](#) to help you [determine resource requirements for growth](#).



## Strategy #3: Improve Morale and Retention by Encouraging Staff Growth

Career opportunities, even laterally, are [2.5x more predictive](#) of staff retention than compensation. Provide your staff with targeted training and support, compelling career path potentials, and opportunities to expand their skill sets.

For more on encouraging growth on enrollment teams, see [pages 37–42 of our staffing research](#).

### Other Resources

For additional insights, explore the following research briefs:

- [Building an Effective Graduate Enrollment Management Plan](#)
- [The Big Bets University Leaders Are Placing on Graduate and Adult Enrollment](#)



# Graduate Enrollment Leaders Struggle to Meet Goals

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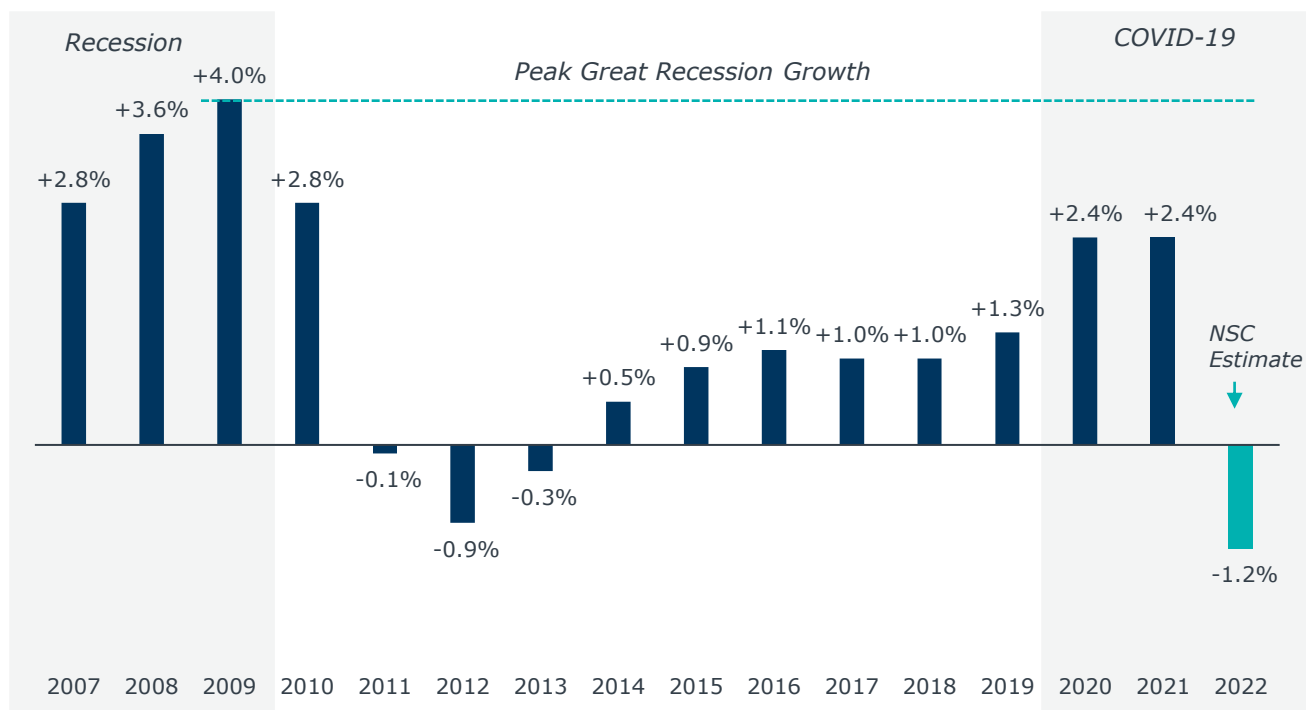
PART

2

# Causes of Increased Pressure on Graduate Programs

## ► Pandemic-Fueled Growth Was Not as Great as Expected

For most of the past decade, graduate enrollments have increased, with growth rates more than doubling during the pandemic. Generally, during economic downturns such as we experienced during the pandemic, graduate enrollment increases, as it did during the Great Recession from 2007 to 2009. However, pandemic-fueled graduate growth was not as strong as previous recession growth nor did it last as long. By 2022, the pandemic surge had receded, with graduate enrollment declining for the first time since 2013.



## ► The Graduate Enrollment Landscape Is Being Shaped by Increased Competition

The decline in graduate enrollment can be attributed, at least in part, to the increasing competition in the graduate space. Several compounding factors revealed in our research contribute to this increase in competition:



### Emergence of large online players

Online graduate students attend one of seven online giants, making it more difficult for the majority of graduate schools to compete with and gain a share of the increasingly popular online market.



### Declining undergraduate enrollments

Fewer high school students are choosing to pursue higher education. This is contributing to an increasing reliance on graduate revenue and likely fewer qualified prospects at the graduate level.



### Perceptions of the value of graduate education

Most graduate students value generous financial support, accredited programs, and strong relationships with faculty, which all make a graduate education worth the time and financial costs of attending. Institutions need to meet these needs if they want to attract prospects.

# Most Graduate Programs Did Not Meet Their 2022 Goals

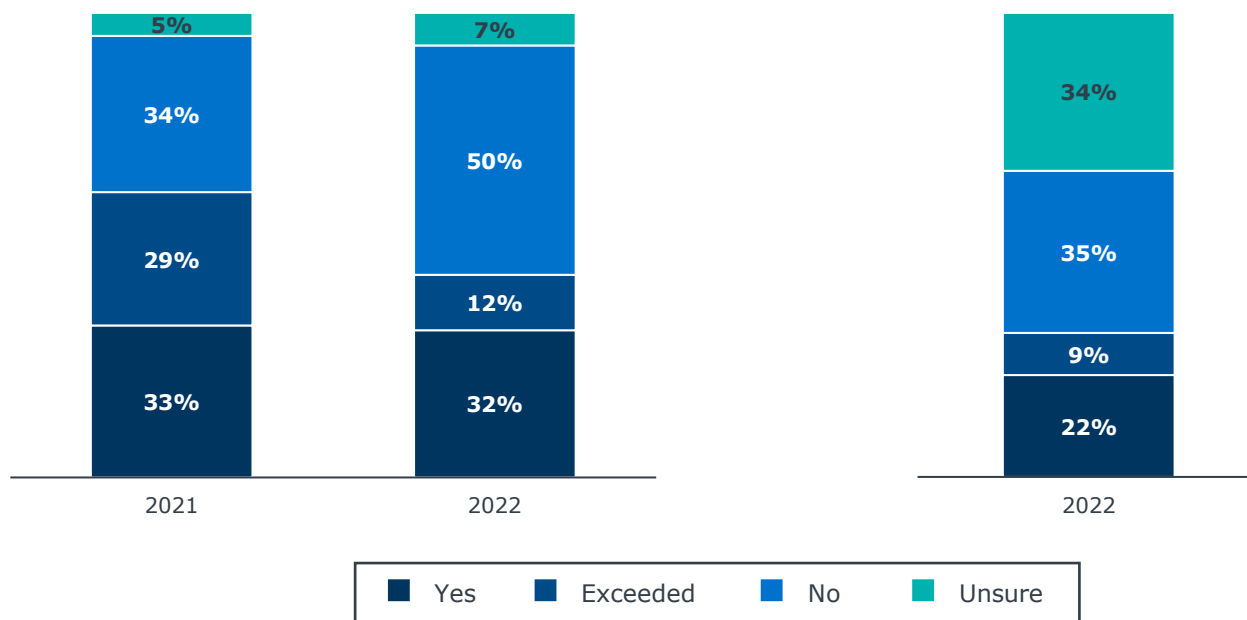
## Fewer Graduate Programs Met Their Enrollment Goals in 2022 Compared to 2021

In 2022, a staggering 50% of surveyed graduate enrollment leaders did not meet their enrollment goals, and 35% missed their net tuition revenue goals. Further segmentation reveals important differences by institution type: 59% of private institutions said they did not meet their enrollment goals, compared to 42% of public institutions. Net tuition revenue reflects a similar trend, with 46% of enrollment leaders at private institutions and 25% of those at public institutions reporting they did not meet their goals.

Our research also found that smaller institutions were less likely than larger institutions to meet their net tuition revenue goals. Forty-nine percent of institutions with enrollments under 1,000 reported they did not meet their net tuition revenue goals, compared to 35% of institutions with enrollments between 1,000 and 4,000 and 28% of institutions with enrollments greater than 4,000.

### Did you meet your enrollment goals?

### Did you meet your net tuition revenue goals?



Regardless of institution type or size, it is clear that the “if you build it, they will come” strategy no longer suffices. Graduate programs are tasked with meeting substantial enrollment and revenue goals but often face budget, resource, and [staff limitations](#) in reaching those goals. Graduate students are taking complex, nonlinear, and stealth journeys to enrollment. In order to reach and enroll these students and achieve graduate growth, enrollment leaders must commit more time, money, and strategic planning to these programs.



### Building an Effective Graduate Enrollment Management Plan

Today’s graduate enrollment management (GEM) plan must adapt with the changing landscape of higher education, such as demographic shifts, advances in technology, multiple delivery modalities, changing student perceptions of education, rising costs, and increased student debt. In addition to the six core elements of a GEM plan explored in the report, the most effective GEM plans take the vision, mission, and strategic initiatives of the institution into account.

Read our [insight paper](#) to learn more about the foundations of an effective GEM plan.

# Many Graduate Enrollment Goals Increased for 2022

## ► Enrollment Priorities Largely Stayed the Same from 2021 to 2022

The top four priorities for graduate enrollment leaders in 2021: (1) higher enrollments, (2) greater ethnic/racial diversity, (3) more revenue, and (4) a higher percentage of online students were the same for 2022. Declining undergraduate enrollment in the last decade had many universities turning to their graduate programs to close the gap in enrollment headcount and tuition revenue. It is not surprising, then, that higher enrollment and more revenue continue to be top-priority goals for many graduate programs. Meanwhile, priorities 2 and 4 reflect leaders’ continued efforts to adapt to changing student demographics and preferences. Since the start of the pandemic, prospective students have increasingly reflected greater ethnic/racial diversity and demanded more flexible offerings.

**Consider the enrollment objectives below and indicate the top priorities for your unit.**  
(Select up to three.)

	2021	2022
Higher enrollments in various programs	64.6%	64.6%
Greater ethnic/racial diversity	53.6%	50.9%
More revenue/net tuition	48.4%	44.5%
Higher percentage of online students	20.1%	19.8%
More students with greater ability to pay	11.4%	15.9%
Higher percentage of international students	14.9%	13.1%
Greater gender balance	10.7%	11.3%
Lower percentage of international students	5.2%	7.3%
Lower discount rate	4.9%	6.1%
Higher average test scores	3.9%	5.5%
Higher percentage of out-of-state students	10.1%	4.6%

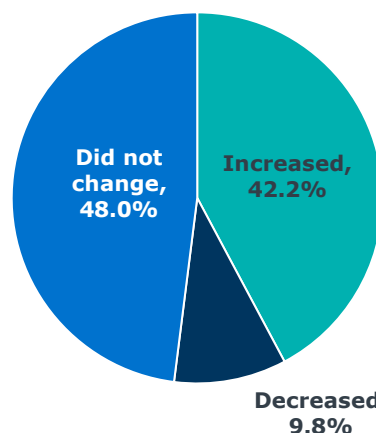
Top four priorities in both 2021 and 2022

## ► Many Graduate Enrollment Leaders Faced Increased Goals for 2022

While the priorities of most graduate enrollment leaders did not change from 2021 to 2022, enrollment goals increased for many. In 2021, 34% of surveyed graduate enrollment leaders did not meet their enrollment goals. Despite this result, 48% of these enrollment goals remained the same for 2022, and 42% were increased.

As previously noted, the decline in undergraduate enrollments is likely influencing the rising graduate enrollment goals. While undergraduate enrollment is not declining as dramatically as it did mid-pandemic, it still [decreased by more than half a million students](#) from 2020 to 2022, creating continued pressure for graduate enrollments to help make up the difference in revenue.

**Compared with last year, how have your enrollment goals changed?**



# Grad Leaders' Goal Input and Attainment Were Linked

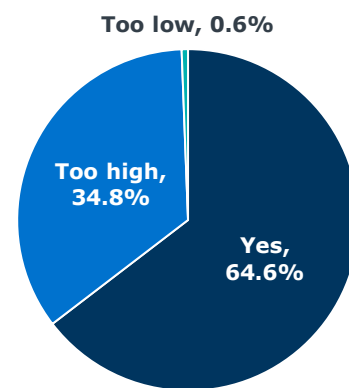
## ▶ More Than One-Third of Enrollment Leaders Think Enrollment Targets Are Too High

Thirty-five percent of surveyed graduate enrollment leaders believe their enrollment targets are unrealistic. Predictably, perceived ability to meet goals has major implications for graduate enrollment leaders' job satisfaction. As mentioned in [Part 1](#), 44% of respondents said unrealistic goals were contributing to workplace stress. At the same time, an EAB survey of senior-most university leaders determined that [41% of executives](#) found setting realistic graduate enrollment goals to be the most difficult aspect of their operations due to the pandemic. With many graduate enrollment leaders and university executives having a difficult time with graduate enrollment goals, it is clear that this topic requires additional exploration.

Our research provided takeaways that may be helpful in this area. When asked how much input they personally had in setting enrollment goals for their graduate program, only 37% of surveyed graduate leaders said they had a "great" or "good" amount of input. While this lack of input may stem from intense pressures on senior-most university leaders to generate revenue from graduate programs, it can unintentionally lead to lack of buy-in among graduate program leaders (i.e., deans, directors, coordinators).

Among participants indicating they had a great deal of input, 97% believed their enrollment goals were realistic. In contrast, among participants indicating they had little or no input, only 57% believed their enrollment goals were realistic.

### Do you believe enrollment targets for your unit are realistic?



## ▶ Graduate Enrollment Leaders with Greater Input in Goals Were More Likely to Meet Them

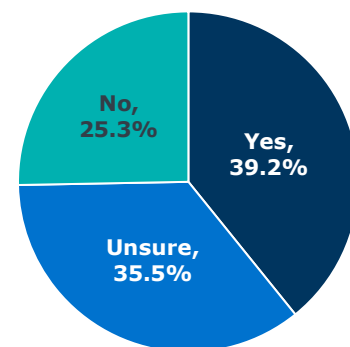
Not only is there a positive correlation between graduate enrollment leaders' input in goal setting and their belief that their goals are realistic but also between graduate enrollment leaders' input in goal setting and their success (i.e., being on track to meet those goals).

Participants reporting a "great deal" of input in setting their unit's enrollment goals were more likely to indicate they are on track to meet their enrollment goals for next semester (53%) compared with those who have "little" (25%) or "no" (27%) input.

In most cases, it is imperative that presidents and provosts work directly with the graduate programs' deans and other stakeholders to make data-informed decisions around goal setting, with shared responsibility and buy-in on enrollment goals. When asked about what keeps them up at night, one survey participant said:

“ I have a supervisor who does not communicate with me on a regular basis. I am left out of decisions regarding graduate studies.”

### Are you on track to meet your unit's enrollment goal for the next semester?



# Strategies to Overcome Goal-Setting Challenges

This research indicates that many institutions are setting unrealistically high graduate enrollment goals. However, there are several approaches that university leaders can use to support graduate enrollment goals while also improving staff morale:



## Strategy #1: Further Invest in Graduate Programs to Realize Graduate Growth

Graduate growth is not guaranteed. Teams need to implement a sound enrollment management plan that works toward their goals. It should include six main components: an environmental scan, smart program development, comprehensive marketing and recruitment, tuition and financial aid considerations, strategies for student success and retention, and an assessment of faculty and resources.

Read our report to learn more about the [six core elements](#) of an effective graduate enrollment management plan.



## Strategy #2: Set Smart and Realistic Enrollment Goals

While graduate programs provide a great opportunity for additional enrollment and revenue for institutions, goals must be set in an intentional and realistic way. Although the specific metrics that should inform graduate enrollment goals can vary by institution type, analyzing key inputs such as your organizational structure and budget model is an effective first step in goal setting.

Explore our goal-setting playbook to help you [determine resource requirements for growth](#).



## Strategy #3: Involve Graduate Enrollment Leaders in Goal Setting

Our research has revealed that institutions that involve their graduate enrollment leaders in goal setting are more likely to meet their enrollment and net tuition revenue goals. Involving your staff in goal setting empowers them to make a difference in the overall performance of graduate priorities and allows them to feel a sense of ownership.

For more on [staff involvement in graduate enrollment](#), review our first report in the series.

### Other Resources

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For additional insights, explore the following research briefs:

- [The Big Bets University Leaders Are Placing on Graduate and Adult Enrollment](#)
- [Understanding Your Future Adult Learner](#)





# Changing Demographics Lead to a Shift in Recruitment Tactics

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INSIGHT

3

# Aligning Marketing and Demographic Preferences

## ► Pressure on Graduate and Adult Education Is Building

As we noted in [Part 2](#), troubling trends in the undergraduate market are placing more pressure on graduate and adult enrollment. From 2010 to 2020, undergraduate enrollment declined by 12%, and as of 2020, 32% of 18–24-year-olds in the United States are opting [not to pursue higher education](#). This downturn in the undergraduate space is leading to a greater reliance on graduate and adult enrollment revenue.

A [recent EAB survey](#) of higher education executives revealed that graduate and adult student enrollment is a pressing concern for most institutions. One hundred percent of surveyed presidents and provosts, as well as 91% of VP EMs, consider graduate and adult enrollment a high or moderate priority.

Meanwhile, our survey findings in Part 2 also confirmed that the priority of the presidents and provosts has begun to impact the pressure and expectations of enrollment and marketing leaders. In 2022, 42% of graduate programs faced increased goals, and a staggering 50% of them were unable to meet those enrollment goals, while 35% missed their net tuition revenue goals.

## ► Prospective Students Are Changing, and So Are Their Needs and Expectations

Amid this increased pressure, student demographics are changing, which means that your go-to strategies for recruiting students are likely to change too. Next year, Millennials will account for 49% of adult learners; Gen Z will account for 31%. However, by 2031, only 30% of adult learners will be Millennials, while Gen Z will account for a full 60%. To ensure the long-term health of your graduate programs, your recruitment tactics will need to speak to changing demographics and the corresponding changes in expectations of prospective students.

### Future Graduate, Adult, and Online Students Are...

#### ...Super Stealth

80%

Stealth prospects now represent 80% of the total applicant pool, up from 20% of applicants in 2012

#### ...Always Online

4.1 hours

Gen Z spends more than 4 hours using apps daily, on average

#### ...Hyper-Distracted

4,000

The average person sees 4,000 brands (logos, advertisements, etc.) each day

These shifts mean that recruitment may be increasingly more difficult in the coming years. Today's consumers expect companies and brands, and similarly institutions, to interact with them directly in trustworthy and authentic ways. With so much time spent online, Gen Z has high expectations for digital content. To get and keep their attention, your recruitment tactics must cut through the clutter to stand out. The following survey findings provide insight into what other graduate enrollment leaders are doing to keep up with market changes.

# Email Campaigns Are a Top Recruitment Challenge

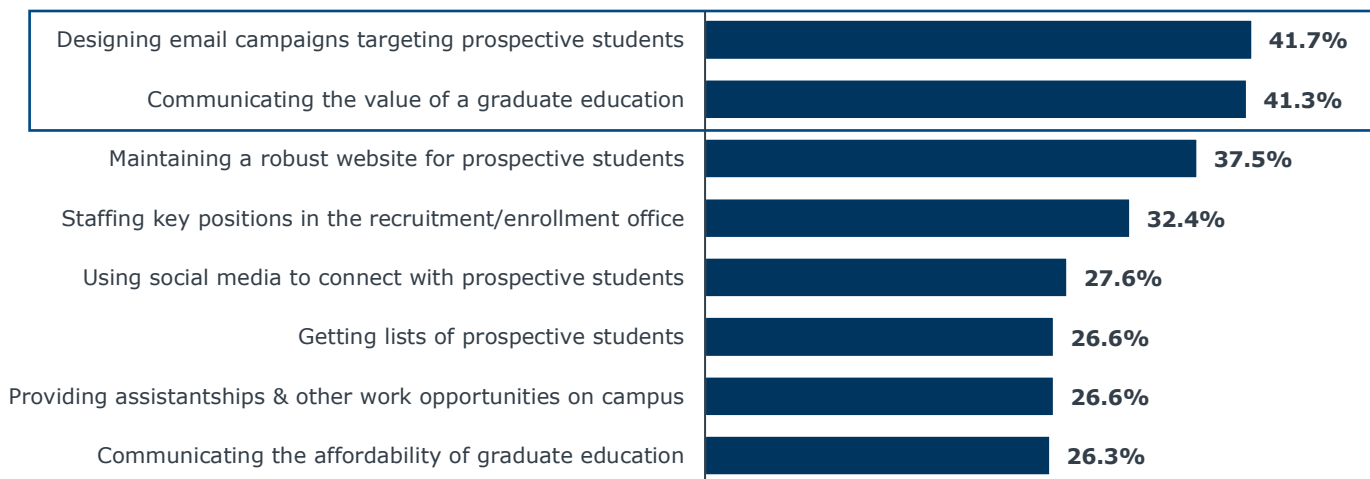
## ▶ Almost Half of Graduate Leaders Want to Improve Their Email Campaigns

Of all the recruitment challenges that graduate leaders face, “designing email campaigns that target prospective students” is their highest priority. This finding isn’t surprising, given that today’s busy graduate and adult learners are spending less and [less time reading the emails they open](#). Couple this with the fact that adults are commonly time-constrained due to competing work, family, and life responsibilities, and it’s easy to see why emails that quickly engage the recipient are critical.

In addition to being succinct, sophisticated, and multimodal, the most effective email campaigns are [intent-based](#) rather than time-based, like traditional drip campaigns. Demographic information and behavioral data gathered on prospective students should be used to ensure messaging is unique and tailored.

**Consider the following recruitment challenges for your graduate programs. Indicate your top priorities for the next enrollment cycle.\***

*(Select up to three.)*



\*Other responses <10%: Offering affordable housing off campus, providing graduate housing for students on campus, adding programs, scholarships/aid, recruiting domestic students, reducing cost, SEO/SEM, CRM, streamlining processes, visa challenges, flexible programs

## ▶ Grad Leaders Also Prioritize Communicating the Value of a Graduate Education

“Communicating the value of earning a graduate degree” is nearly tied with survey participants’ first choice for the top recruitment priority for graduate leaders—and for good reason. Based on aggregated results from [surveys of potential adult learners](#) from 2019 to 2022, we know that students’ top two priorities when considering enrolling in a graduate program are successful job placement (46%) and generous financial aid (34%). Financial considerations are an incredibly important aspect of an enrollment decision, and in order to increase enrollments, your institution must properly communicate its return on investment and connection to career success.

Our research suggests three ways to [demonstrate that your program is worth](#) the cost:

1. Experiment with new ways to convey program outcomes
2. Develop shareable content for current students and alumni to encourage word-of-mouth marketing
3. Incorporate experiential learning into your program so students graduate with marketable skills

# Impact of Recruitment Activities Varies by Modality

## ▶ Events Present a Greater Recruitment Opportunity for In-Person Programs

As shown in the table below, events provided the best enrollment outcomes for graduate and professional schools. However, as may be expected, events were especially effective for in-person programs (39.1%) compared to hybrid (22.5%) and online programs (21.4%). While it is not surprising to learn, the findings affirm that experiences in an in-person environment are likely more influential for students who plan to spend a significant amount of time on campus with professors and their classmates.

### What student recruitment activity has provided the best outcomes in terms of graduate/professional school enrollments?\*

Recruitment Activity	Percentage Reporting
Events	24.5%
Email	15.4%
Web inquiries	15.0%
Referrals from alumni	14.3%
SEO/SEM	11.9%
Text messaging	4.2%
Social media	3.1%
Phone campaigns	1.4%

\*Not including responses <1%

Though events were identified as the top-performing recruitment activity for in-person programs, each activity plays a significant role in having a robust graduate recruitment strategy. Other high-performing activities included referrals from alumni, web inquiries, and emails.

## ▶ Recruitment Activities’ Impact on Online and Hybrid Programs More Evenly Spread

Survey respondents whose programs are in a hybrid or online setting identified a wide range of recruitment activities that had a big impact on enrollments. In addition to events, enrollment leaders reported that emails, web inquiries, and SEO/SEM activities also delivered significant impact. This success with a range of sources aligns with findings from our recent survey of graduate and adult learners in which only 11% had first heard of their program via direct recruitment marketing.

Gleaned from our newest research on marketing to graduate and adult students are four tactics to contact, recruit, and [enroll stealth shoppers](#), shown below.

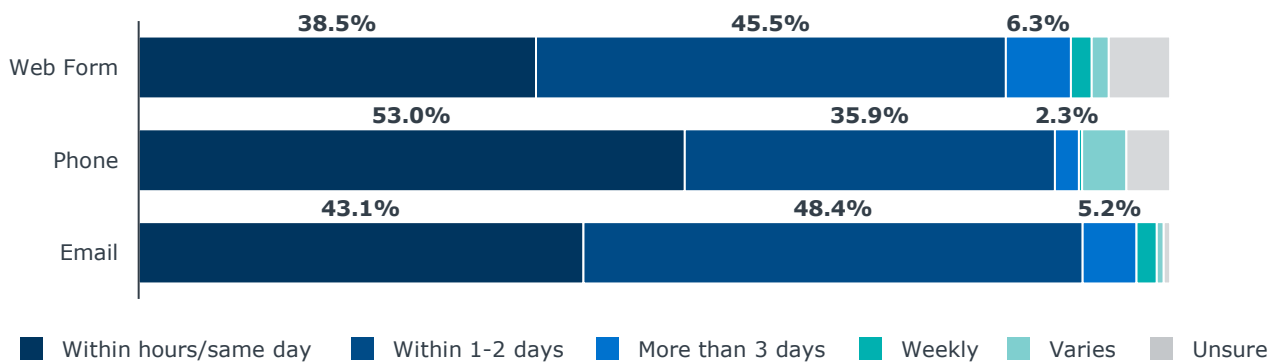
- 1. Use storytelling to differentiate your brand**—four criteria you can use to differentiate your brand include your program’s relevance, reach, difficulty to replicate, and outcomes data.
- 2. Meet Gen Z on TikTok (when possible)**—40% of Gen Z uses TikTok as a search engine, and you don’t want to miss out on this huge opportunity to reach your prospects where they are.
- 3. Make the most of faculty expertise**—in addition to proving their expertise in a field, including faculty in recruitment can also help prospective students feel more connected to your institution.
- 4. Make your website a priority**—according to a 2021 EAB survey, 94% of prospective graduate and adult learners make a point to visit websites of all schools they’re considering. With that in mind, investing in a well-designed and user-friendly website is paramount.

# Rapid Response Is Now Table Stakes

## ▶ The Majority of Institutions Are Able to Fulfill Info Requests Within Two Days

Ninety-one percent of institutions are responding to information requests through emails within two days, as well as 89% of phone requests and 84% of web requests. If your team is not following up with inquiries/requests within this two-day time frame, your program is less likely to be prioritized by busy and distracted prospective learners.

**For each channel, indicate how quickly you contact prospective students after they request information.**



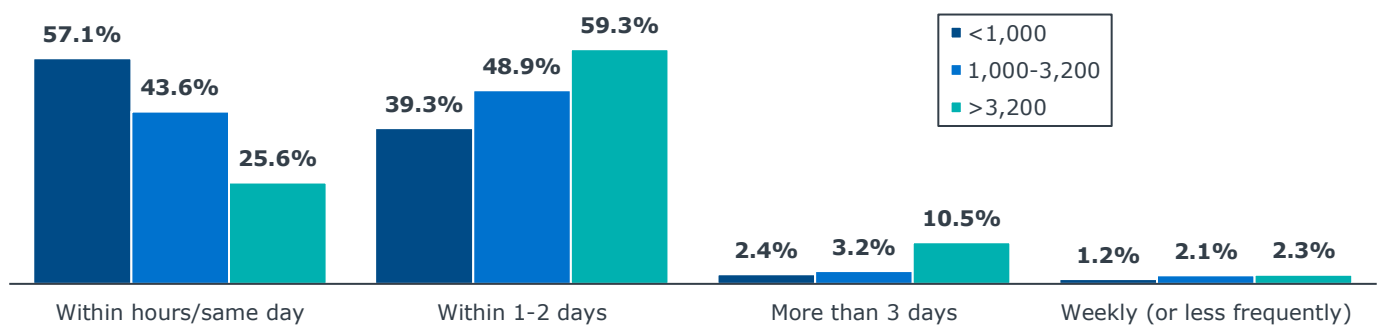
EAB research indicates that adult students often have unique and nonlinear [journeys to enrollment](#). Some prospective students may research their options for three years and still choose employment over enrollment, while others will move from research to application in three months. To ensure that your programs stay top of mind for preoccupied adult learners, your team should respond to requests as quickly as possible—ideally, within two days.

## ▶ On Average, Smaller Schools Respond More Quickly than Larger Schools

While maybe not surprising, it is important to note that smaller schools were able to respond to students' requests/inquiries more quickly than larger schools. For email inquiries, as an example, 57.1% of schools with fewer than 1,000 graduate students responded on the same day, compared to 43.6% of schools with enrollment between 1,000 and 3,200, and just 25.6% of schools with more than 3,200 graduate students. Though it may be more difficult for programs with a larger number of inquiries to respond in a timely manner, it is of the utmost importance in order to be competitive.

**Indicate how quickly you contact prospective students after they request information through email.\***

*(Broken down by graduate enrollment headcount)*



\*Not including responses for those who were unsure.

# Strategies to Overcome Recruitment Challenges

Our research has found that graduate and adult learners are becoming increasingly difficult to recruit, and this trend will only continue as Gen Z becomes a larger portion of the prospect pool. Here are three ways your team can reach this critical population:



## Strategy #1: Ensure Email Campaigns Are Responsive and Personalized

Modern marketing leverages machine learning, advanced targeting, and deep consumer knowledge to personalize messages that drive greater engagement. To stand out among the plethora of emails sent daily by big brands and other schools, your messaging must resonate and be aligned with prospects' motivations, goals, and interests.

For more tips to improve your outreach, review our research on [recruitment email auditing](#).



## Strategy #2: Use a Diversified Acquisition and Engagement Strategy

The adult learner journey to enrollment continues to be dominated by self-shopping. Students aged 26 and older, and particularly students 35 and older, are especially likely to research programs for at least one year. As they navigate this long and winding journey, it is important to use a variety of sources to engage students at their moment of intent.

Explore our survey findings to help you [understand your future adult learner](#).



## Strategy #3: Prioritize Rapid Follow-Up with Prospects

As our research has shown, most institutions are able to respond to information requests quickly. To compete in a tightening market, institutions will need to optimize not only their response time but every aspect of their enrollment strategy from program design to marketing and recruitment campaigns.

Take our self-assessment to learn the best [opportunities to improve your recruitment strategy](#).

### Other Resources

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For additional insights, explore the following research briefs:

- [The Big Bets University Leaders Are Placing on Graduate and Adult Enrollment](#)
- [Building an Effective Graduate Enrollment Management Plan](#)



# Survey Methodology

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## ▶ About the Survey

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In their third year of research collaboration, EAB [Adult Learner Recruitment](#) and [NAGAP](#), The Association for Graduate Enrollment Management, investigated the graduate school landscape through a series of three brief surveys, conducted from September 2022 to March 2023. The 753 unique respondents to the survey represent 468 unique institutions, 50 states, and have 16 years of higher education experience, on average.

## ▶ Survey 1 Information

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The first survey, conducted from September 21 to October 6, 2022, asked enrollment managers and other higher education professionals about their current work environment. Where applicable, findings are compared to results from a survey with NAGAP members and EAB partners conducted in January of 2022.

### Respondents



508 unique respondents

### Institutions Represented



343 unique institutions across 50 states

- 51% private
- 49% public

### Instruction Type



- 78% on-campus and online
- 18% on-campus only
- 4% online only

## ▶ Survey 2 Information

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The second survey, conducted from November 15 to December 5, 2022, asked graduate enrollment managers and other higher education professionals about their institutions' performance on key graduate enrollment metrics.

### Respondents



340 unique respondents

### Institutions Represented



275 unique institutions across 50 states

- 54% private
- 46% public

### Instruction Type



- 76% on-campus and online
- 19% on-campus only
- 5% online only

## ▶ Survey 3 Information

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The third survey, conducted from February 22 to March 8, 2023, asked graduate enrollment managers and other higher education professionals about their institutions' marketing and recruitment tactics.

### Respondents



313 unique respondents

### Institutions Represented



256 unique institutions across 50 states

- 50% private
- 50% public

### Instruction Type



- 75% on-campus and online
- 20% on-campus only
- 5% online only



# EAB's Adult Learner Recruitment

**Adult Learner Recruitment** is a true enrollment partner for graduate, online, professional, and adult degree completion programs. Our next-generation growth strategies help you see around corners in this dynamic market and amplify your results at every stage of the enrollment funnel.

STRATEGIZE > ACQUIRE > ENGAGE > YIELD

180+ Partner Institutions

No Two Partnerships Alike



## STRATEGIZE

We go beyond OPMs and digital-marketing agencies to help you develop a plan to succeed in this dynamic market. Starting with a deep understanding of your institution's needs and goals, our team of experts provides guidance on critical topics such as program and portfolio design, growth opportunities, organizational design, pricing strategy, corporate partnerships, and more.



## ACQUIRE

We generate a large audience from a diverse mix of proprietary sources—including our consumer database and Cappex's student search platform—and other sources, including first-party digital targeting lists, test-taker lists, your institution's inquiry pool, recent alumni, and current undergraduates. Our lead-generation experts partner with your team to develop a strategy that will meet your enrollment and class-shaping goals.



## ENGAGE

We drive enrollment results with responsive campaigns choreographed across channels and customized to each student's intent and behavior. We engage prospective students at every stage of their journey from awareness to application using micro-surveys, responsive landing pages, behavioral campaign flows, data-informed creative, and a streamlined application experience.



## YIELD

We deploy a proprietary survey-based approach to help you determine accepted students' intentions, predict which students will enroll, and triage your outreach.

## WHAT MAKES EAB DIFFERENT

Strategy  
Transformation

+

Unrivaled  
Access

+

Marketing  
Orchestration

+

Intelligent  
Analytics

To discuss how EAB can help you meet your graduate and adult enrollment goals, email [lexrubyhowe@eab.com](mailto:lexrubyhowe@eab.com). Learn more at [eab.com/ALR](https://eab.com/ALR).



# Education's Trusted Partner to Help Schools and Students Thrive



**Your Imperatives Determine Ours**

**INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY**

**Prepare Your Institution for the Future**

Executive guidance rooted in research to support your strategic priorities

**MARKETING AND ENROLLMENT**

**Achieve Your Enrollment and Growth Goals**

Tailored partnerships powered by a recruitment ecosystem with unrivaled reach to enroll your future classes

**STUDENT SUCCESS**

**Build a Student-Centric Campus**

Technology trusted by 850 schools to retain, graduate, and empower more students

**DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION**

**Advance DEI on Campus and in Your Community**

Technology, research, and bold initiatives to strengthen your DEI strategy and eliminate equity gaps

**DATA AND ANALYTICS**

**Embrace Digital Transformation**

Data and analytics solutions built for higher education to guide decisions and accelerate innovation

We partner with **2,500+** institutions to accelerate progress and enable lasting change.

**95%+** of our partners return to us year after year because of results we achieve, together.





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## ABOUT EAB

At EAB, our mission is to make education smarter and our communities stronger. We work with thousands of institutions to drive transformative change through data-driven insights and best-in-class capabilities. From kindergarten to college to career, EAB partners with leaders and practitioners to accelerate progress and drive results across five major areas: enrollment, student success, institutional strategy, data analytics, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We work with each partner differently, tailoring our portfolio of research, technology, and marketing and enrollment solutions to meet the unique needs of every leadership team, as well as the students and employees they serve. Learn more at [eab.com](https://eab.com).