Higher ed’s future will be written by how we respond to three trends: the diversification and shrinking of the traditional-age student population, waning public confidence in the value of a degree, and the ripple effects of pandemic-era disrupted K-12 learning. Last fall we spoke with student success leaders across the country about these trends and the decade ahead. We came away with 30 student success priorities for the 2020s, organized here into six thematic groups. Some of these were expected and some were surprising, and each will be experienced uniquely by different institutions.

Use this list to assess your priorities for the future.

NEW PATHWAYS

1. Transfers: Building pathways to transfer sources and receivers while improving the speed and quality of the credit articulation process
2. Stop-Outs: Recovering lost students through a combination of special outreach and dedicated re-onboarding support
3. Degree completers: Recruiting “some college and no degree” students who earned credits at other institutions and want to complete
4. Online and flexible learners: Embracing innovations that came from pandemic online learning and supporting faculty in this transition
5. Non-degree programs: Supporting students in shorter programs or single courses, often with a focus on upskilling workers

MENTAL HEALTH

6. Tuition: Controlling net tuition increases and using large endowments to eliminate tuition for some students and families
7. Financial aid: Continuing to innovate with small emergency and completion grants to assist with temporary financial distress
8. Basic needs support: Expanding food pantries and related programs to support with minimal financial resources
9. Childcare: Covering a major expense and barriers to enrollment for parents, especially single mothers
10. Work-schedule flexibility: Making support services available to working students taking classes outside of normal business hours

ACADEMICS

11. Multicultural: Supporting the diverse needs of students from different racial, ethnic, and international backgrounds
12. LGBTQ: Recognizing the needs and experiences of different sexual identities, with a special focus on supporting nonbinary and trans students
13. Economic: Creating a welcoming and supporting environment for students from lower-income backgrounds, especially at selective institutions
14. Age: Rethinking support for older and working students with different needs, learning styles, and work-life challenges
15. Neurodiversity: Building new support structures for students with different learning and social needs stemming from their neuro-architecture

FINANCES

16. Counseling: Ensuring that providers can support your students’ diverse identities and that capacity keeps up with demand
17. Belongingness initiatives: Helping all students feel at home at your school and connected to a community in which they feel accepted
18. Wellness programs: Supporting the “Eight Dimensions of Wellness” by encouraging healthy behaviors and mindsets
19. Social development: Helping students develop the social skills that may have been delayed during pandemic isolation
20. Self-education: Encouraging students to explore their mental health through self-assessments and educational modules

INCLUSION

21. Courses and programs: Integrating career preparation and civic engagement into curricula without losing the liberal arts ethos
22. Pedagogy: Keeping pace with virtual and hyflex learning innovations to better meet students where they already are
23. Advising: Adopting tandem advising models that provide each student with a support team of advisors, faculty, and student services
24. Academic support: Preparing for the increase in demand for math tutoring and academic support later in the decade
25. Developmental education: Replacing noncredit remedial courses with credit-bearing supplemental instruction

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

26. Workforce alignment: Aligning course skills development to emerging workforce needs, such as artificial intelligence
27. Career preparation: Embracing career development as a student outcome and hardwiring career training into curricula
28. Job placement: Building out connections with employers to provide students with clear pathways into the workforce
29. Employer demand: Communicating with local employers to showcase institutional strengths and encourage them to hire more graduates
30. Wage leverage: Competing with high hourly wages by showing students a clear ROI on their investment of time and money

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