

ADULT LEARNER RECRUITMENT

Understanding and Navigating Today's Graduate Enrollment Staffing Concerns

Survey Insights and Self-Assessments to Help You Build a Resilient Graduate Enrollment Team



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Using This Report

Insights from Our Survey of Graduate Enrollment Staff

To help university leaders get a better sense of the complex graduate enrollment landscape, EAB has partnered with NAGAP to conduct a series of surveys of graduate enrollment staff. The first of our three surveys for academic year 2024–2025, conducted in fall 2024, explored how staffing challenges and the growing use of AI are impacting graduate enrollment teams. **This report shares three key insights to help graduate enrollment leaders better understand factors influencing staff retention. It also includes self-assessment tools to help readers identify areas for improvement supported by our findings.**

Topics Covered in Upcoming EAB and NAGAP Survey Reports in 2025

- ▶ *Meeting enrollment goals*
- ▶ *Marketing and recruitment tactics*

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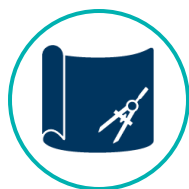
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Navigating Continued Challenges in Staffing

► Monetary Topics Fueling Staff Challenges and Concerns

Graduate leadership is at a pivotal moment, with stress and staffing challenges continuing to test resilience across institutions. As graduate staff navigate heavy workloads, fiscal constraints, and shifting priorities, the rapid rise of artificial intelligence offers a glimpse of both potential relief and new complexities. Recent findings shed light on how these intertwined challenges are evolving.

Our survey has revealed that graduate enrollment staff are especially sensitive when it comes to monetary subjects. Budget and fiscal challenges are top workplace stressors, and graduate enrollment leaders continue to name “pay and benefits” as a top reason to consider looking for other employment. One of the top concerns among survey respondents regarding the use of AI is the high cost of acquisition and training.

52%

of survey respondents said “budget/fiscal challenges” are a top workplace stressor

45%

of survey respondents who are considering leaving their jobs are looking for “better pay/benefits”

34%

of survey respondents said that “cost of acquisition and training” is a top AI concern

As budget is already a major concern for graduate enrollment leaders, and the new administration threatens to reduce funding for education even further, it is more important than ever that every dollar is well spent and that every decision is made with efficiency and effectiveness in mind. Against this backdrop, AI is emerging as a potential game-changer, with its role in streamlining operations and addressing staffing gaps gaining traction.

► New Opportunities as AI Moves from Experimentation to Action

Across higher education this year, AI moved from a curiosity to a critical tool. Students rapidly adopted AI tools, with [86% of surveyed students using AI tools](#) for everyday responsibilities and bigger tasks such as career planning. University leaders are catching up, with more institutions integrating AI into their strategic plans. With the help of AI and machine learning, enrollment teams were able to craft hyper-personalized recruitment messages and create unique and engaging experiences for prospective students. AI-powered admissions counselors and chatbots allowed general student inquiries to be addressed more quickly and efficiently.

As we explored in last year’s reports, when enrollment teams use AI tools to brainstorm, create content, or analyze data, they can free up capacity to focus on tasks that require their unique expertise. As familiarity with AI grows, it presents not only a way to automate processes and improve efficiency—but also an opportunity to create more meaningful, personalized connections with prospective students. However, that won’t happen without intentional investment in staff training, a focus on AI ethics, and robust and detailed AI policies. This report explores these trends, highlighting the challenges and opportunities that AI might bring to the forefront of graduate enrollment leadership.

Budget and Workload Contributing to Significant Stress

► Most Surveyed Graduate Enrollment Leaders Are at Least Moderately Stressed

Eighty percent of surveyed graduate enrollment leaders report experiencing moderate or higher levels of workplace stress. While this is an exceptionally high percentage, and should not be ignored, it is important to note that this is a decrease from both 2022 and 2023, when 92% and 89% of enrollment leaders reported experiencing at least moderate levels of job-related stress, respectively.

► Unfilled Positions Replaced by Budget Challenges as Top Stressor

For more than half of surveyed graduate enrollment staff, the top workplace stressor was “budget/fiscal challenges,” a new option added to our 2024 survey. Another new option, “[leadership changes](#),” tied with “heavier workload” as the second-greatest contributor to workplace stress.

On the other hand, fewer respondents identified “unrealistic goals” and “unfilled staff positions” as top stressors, indicating some welcome relief in these areas. The percentage of respondents who said “unrealistic goals” as a top stress factor dropped 6 points compared to 2022. “Unfilled staff positions,” which was the top stressor in both 2022 and 2023, dropped 21 percentage points in this survey compared to 2022. However, an analysis of respondents’ comments indicated that the biggest reliever of stress would be additional staff, followed by more flexibility.

What factors are influencing the stressfulness of your current work situation? (Select all that apply.)

	Sept '24	Sept '23	Sept '22
Budget/fiscal challenges	52%	—	—
Heavier workload	41%	45%	55%
Leadership changes	41%	—	—
Unrealistic goals	38% ¹	43%	44%
Unfilled staff positions	36%	45%	57%
Low office morale	32%	28%	39%
Shortfalls in grad enrollments	32%	—	—
Mental health of colleagues, family, self	25%	28%	19%
Challenges due to hybrid work	20%	13%	—
Conflict with/among co-workers	20%	18%	17%
Financial aid/FAFSA challenges	20%	—	—
Caring for children/family	19%	18%	17%
Mental health of students	17%	16%	11%
Campus climate challenges	17%	—	—

37%
of respondents who work at private institutions indicated “**shortfalls in grad enrollments**” is a top stress factor, compared to **24%** of respondents who work at public institutions.

31%
of respondents who work at institutions with <1,000 students indicated **FAFSA challenges** are a top stress factor, compared to **13%** of respondents who work at institutions with >3,500 students.

Choices not included in previous survey indicated by —

1) Includes participants who selected “unrealistic goals” and/or “aggressive/unrealistic enrollment targets.”

Source: NASPA, “[Understanding Turnover in Higher Education: Causes, Consequences, and Solutions.](#)”

Self-Assessment: Managing Staff Stress Levels

Despite the decrease in staff stress levels since 2022, it is concerning that four in five staff feel moderately, very, or extremely stressed. As we'll explore in the next section, stress management for your team is crucial to avoid high levels of turnover.

Consider the following statements to understand where you can improve stress management efforts within your team:

Managing Staff Stress	This statement describes my institution.		
	No	Partially	Yes
Understanding Staff Stress We regularly administer surveys or questionnaires to graduate enrollment staff to understand their stress levels and stress factors.			
Budget/Fiscal Challenges The budget for our graduate programs is proportionate to our enrollment and revenue goals, relative to other institutional goals.			
Workload and Staffing Workload is reasonable and evenly distributed throughout the department. Functions are outsourced as needed if workload becomes unreasonable.			
Leadership Changes Staff are notified of potential leadership changes as early as possible, including reasoning for the changes and how changes will impact their work.			
Enrollment and Revenue Targets Graduate enrollment and revenue goals are realistic, based on historical data.			
Office and Team Morale Team members are shown appreciation and respect through various work and non-work-related activities on a regular basis.			
Total "No," "Partially," and "Yes" Responses			

Resources to Explore

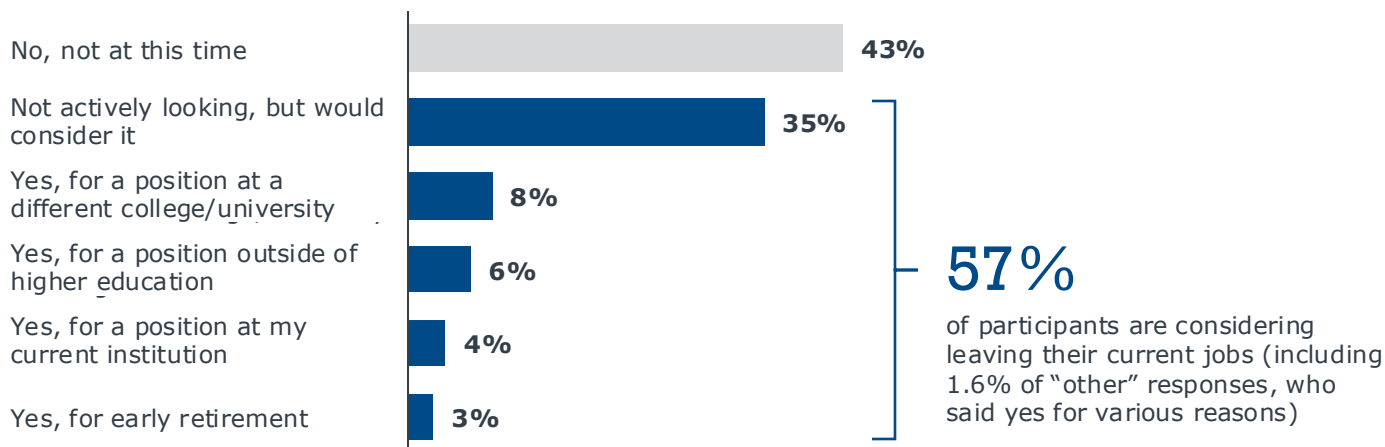
- Use this [step-by-step guide](#) to calculate an appropriate lead generation budget.
- Read our [blog](#) on the cost of the wrong investment.
- Review our [blog](#) on ways to improve your hiring webpage.
- Consider our [report](#) on setting smart graduate enrollment goals.

Staff Searching for Greater Pay, Support, and Flexibility

► Over Half of Respondents Are Considering Leaving Their Current Position

More respondents are considering leaving their current position now (57%) than they were in 2023 (54%), and 50% of respondents know a colleague who is considering resigning. The growing portion of staff open to or actively leaving their roles poses a real threat to the long-term success of graduate enrollment teams, many of which are already feeling the pressure of a heavy workload and unrealistic goals. Notably, respondents who work in corporate partnership strategy roles were less likely to consider leaving than those who work in financial aid (i.e., 48% compared to 63%).

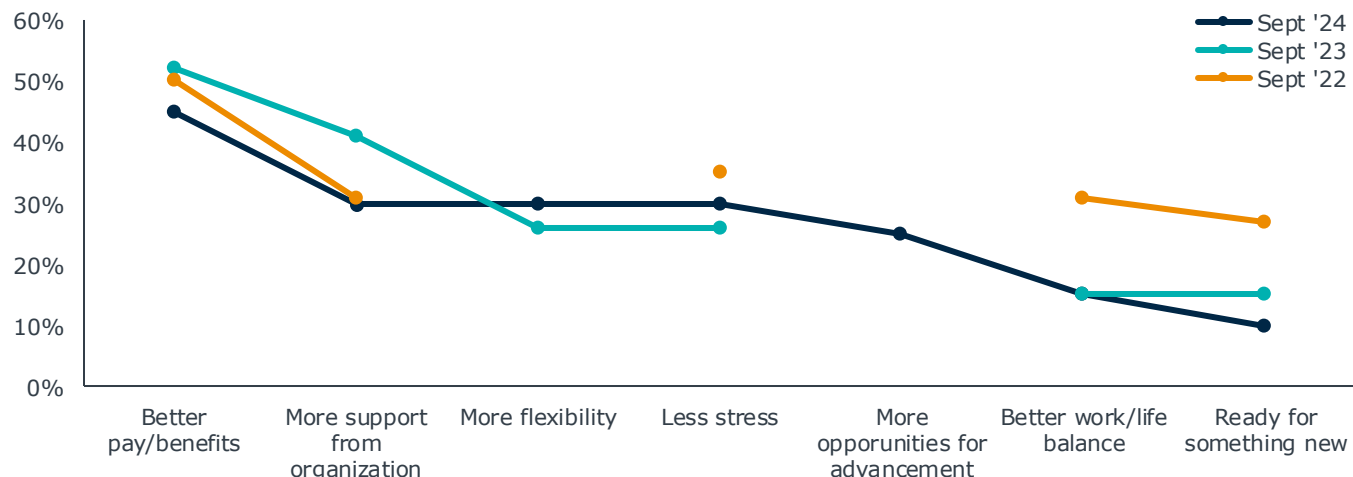
Are you considering leaving your current position?



► Better Pay Remains Core Reason for Staff Retention Concerns

"Better pay/benefits" continues to be the top reason graduate enrollment staff consider resigning year over year. "More support from organization," "more flexibility," and "less stress" are all tied for second with 30% of respondents selecting these reasons, with "more opportunities for career advancement," a new survey option this year, a close third. Meanwhile, the percentage of respondents looking for something new or for better work/life balance has decreased significantly since 2022.

Why are you considering leaving higher education?* (Select up to two reasons.)



*Asked of participants who indicated they are looking for a position outside higher education. Not all responses were asked each year.

Self-Assessment: Improving Staff Retention

Most industries, including higher education, struggled to ramp up staffing again after the pandemic required significant layoffs. Unfortunately, those effects can still be felt in higher ed, as noted by survey participants. Poor staff retention may put your team in danger of missing its graduate enrollment goals through increased stress, increased workload, and poor team morale.

Consider the following statements to understand how your team can improve staff satisfaction and retention rates.

Improving Staff Retention Rates	This statement describes my institution.		
	No	Partially	Yes
Competitive Pay and Benefits We review our compensation packages yearly and benchmark them against local competitors to ensure our benefits are competitive.			
Organizational Support We provide our staff with resources to meet enrollment targets, including physical, mental, and emotional resources to support their well-being.			
Flexible Work Options When possible, we offer flexible work options for our staff, such as working from home on Fridays or alternative schedules to allow for personal responsibilities.			
Advancement Opportunities Managers have regular conversations with staff about career pathing, learning opportunities and workshops, and general professional development.			
Work-Life Balance Staff time is respected. When full-time employees have worked 40 hours in a week, they are permitted to leave work unfinished. Tasks are outsourced if work is consistently left unfinished.			
Total "No," "Partially," and "Yes" Responses			

Resources to Explore

- Review pages 37–42 of our [staffing research](#).
- Explore this [infographic](#) on fostering inclusive interactions.
- Review our [partner service](#) on research about mitigating burnout.

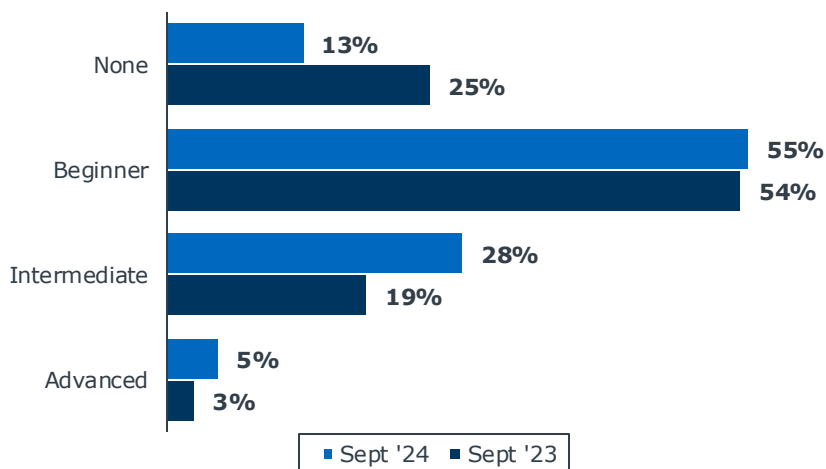
AI Is a Growing Priority and Potential Solution

► More Grad Leaders (Along with Grad Teams and Institutions at Large) Are Using AI

Respondents’ familiarity with AI has grown by 12 percentage points in the past year, with 87% of respondents having tried using AI tools. There were no significant differences in familiarity with AI by institution type.

At the same time, the number of institutions that have made AI a strategic priority increased from 8% in last year’s survey to 19% this year. More institutions are also using AI in their marketing and enrollment efforts in 2024 (23%) than in 2023 (19%). This is especially true of private institutions compared to public ones.

How would you categorize your level of familiarity with AI?



► Top AI Uses Reflect Efficiency Advantages of the New Technology

As was the case in our 2023 survey, respondents identified these as the most compelling uses of AI in admissions: (1) drafting marketing content, (2) using chatbots to field questions, and (3) designing/optimizing marketing communication flows. Each of these use cases can make admissions work more efficient, thereby freeing up staff capacity for tasks that need a human touch.

► Leaders Have Range of Fears Regarding AI, but Legal Concerns Diminish as AI Use Widens

Ninety-one percent of respondents said they have various and wide-ranging concerns about the use of AI in admissions. Forty-one percent of surveyed graduate enrollment leaders find the “integrity of student applications” to be the top concern related to AI, but this fear is more prevalent for on-campus program leaders than leaders of hybrid or online programs. “Cost of acquisition and training” is also a top fear, especially for larger enrollment teams (i.e., six or more staff).

The most notable change between 2023 and 2024 was the decrease in concern about “exposure to legal risks,” which may indicate that graduate enrollment leaders have a better understanding of how they can use AI—a positive sign in the era of AI.

What are your greatest fears concerning the use of AI in admissions? (top six responses)

	Sept '24	Sept '23
Integrity of student applications	41%	—
Cost of acquisition and training	34%	36%
Inadvertently sharing proprietary/personal information	25%	24%
Uneven playing field against institutions spending more in this area	24%	30%
Introduction of bias in candidate assessment	23%	27%
Exposure to legal risks	21%	31%

Choice not included in previous survey indicated by —

Self-Assessment: Establishing AI Best Practices

With more institutions using AI in admissions and making its use a strategic priority, faculty and staff need to be well-versed in the opportunities and risks associated with AI. It is crucial to clearly outline institutional policies and best practices associated with the use of AI at your institution as its adoption grows.

Consider the following statements to understand how your institution can improve its communications about AI policies and best practices.

Establishing AI Best Practices	This statement describes my institution.		
	No	Partially	Yes
Institution-Wide Statement on AI We have publicly committed to embracing responsible AI innovation and AI literacy through an institutional statement that communicates our overall position on AI.			
Acceptable Use Policy We provide detailed guidance on how students and faculty should responsibly communicate about AI and use AI tools for teaching and learning activities.			
Open Line of Communication We proactively address common AI questions and pushback to clarify common misconceptions and build trust among faculty. We continue to ensure an open line of communication about AI.			
AI Resource Repository We connect faculty and instructors with free resources to address questions about AI pedagogy and curriculum that pose common barriers to incorporating AI into teaching.			
Faculty Support Groups and Trainings We set aside intentional time for faculty and staff to practice using AI in group settings, allowing them to ask questions and discuss with peers in real time.			
Total “No,” “Partially,” and “Yes” Responses			

Resources to Explore

- Explore our [AI playbook](#) for graduate and adult education enrollment leaders.
- Read this [blog](#) to learn 7 missteps university leaders must avoid in their AI strategy.
- Browse this [blog](#) to see 3 types of AI policies your institution needs.

Survey Methodology

▶ About the Survey

In their fifth year of research collaboration, EAB [Adult Learner Recruitment](#) and [NAGAP](#), The Association for Graduate Enrollment Management, are investigating the graduate school landscape through a series of three brief surveys. The first survey, the focus of this report, asked enrollment managers and other higher education professionals about their current work environment and use of artificial intelligence. A total of 313 individuals responded to the survey, representing 42 states (and 3 Canadian provinces) and 258 institutions/programs across the country. Participants had an average of 17 years of experience in higher education.

▶ Data Collection

This survey was sent to graduate and professional school enrollment managers and other higher education practitioners, including current NAGAP members, in fall 2024. Where applicable, findings are compared to results from similar surveys conducted in September 2023 and 2022.

Profile of Survey Respondents

Institution Type ¹	Percentage
Public	52%
Private	47%

Modality	Percentage
Hybrid	79%
On-Campus Only	18%
Online Only	3%

Respondent Responsibilities ²	Percentage
Enrollment/Recruitment/Admissions	82%
Marketing/Communications	38%
Student Services	29%
Corporate Partnership Strategy	12%
Financial Aid	11%
Registrar's Office	8%

Additional findings from surveys on the following topics coming in future reports:

▶ *Meeting enrollment goals*

▶ *Marketing and recruitment tactics*

1) One percent of participants work at for-profit institutions.
2) Respondents could indicate more than one area of responsibility.

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.

Outperform the Market at Every Stage of the Funnel



Strategize

Identify and build market-ready programs for competitive advantage



Curate

Expand and diversify your pool of right-fit students



Cultivate

Customized campaigns to drive students to application



Convert

Improve yield and retention to maximize enrollment potential

What Makes EAB Different

40+ Years of **Higher Ed Expertise**

Unrivaled Access to New Audiences

Seamless **Marketing Orchestration**

Visibility into Full-Funnel Performance

Proven Results in a Dynamic Landscape

200+

Partner institutions

6:1

Average ROI across multiyear partnership

18%

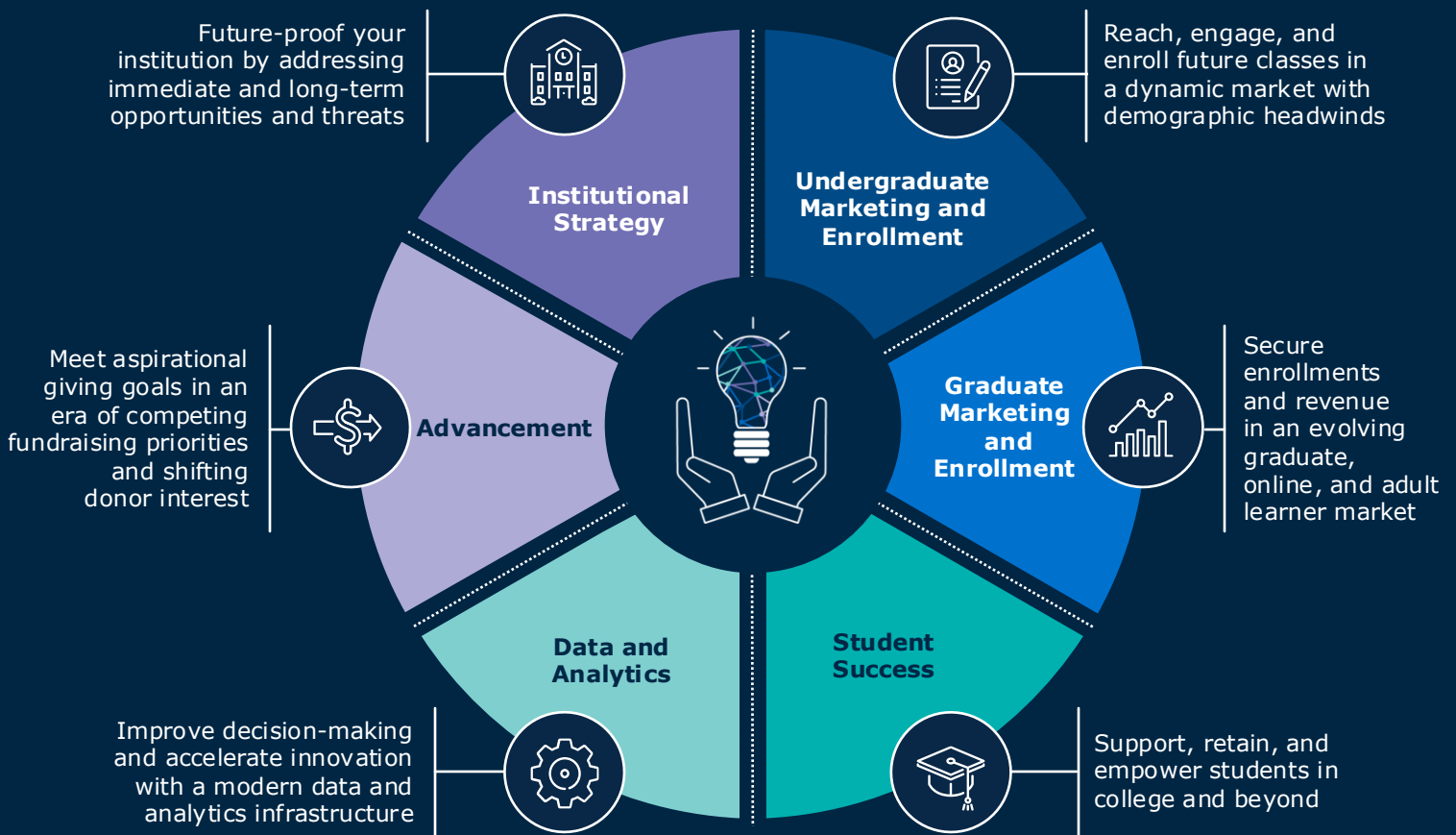
Average graduate enrollment growth

\$2M

Average NTR influenced per partner

To discuss how EAB can help you meet your graduate and adult enrollment goals, email LexRubyHowe@eab.com. Learn more at eab.com/ALR.

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Priorities and Toughest Challenges**



We partner with **2,800+** institutions to accelerate progress, deliver results, and enable lasting change.

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

About NAGAP



NAGAP, The Association for Graduate Enrollment Management is the only professional organization devoted exclusively to the concerns of individuals working in the graduate enrollment management environment.

Membership in NAGAP provides an opportunity to network with professional colleagues at all sizes and types of institutions: large and small, public and private, secular and non-secular. The annual conference, professional development institutes, membership directory, weekly NAGAP News, Perspectives newsmagazine, mentor program, and chapter affiliations all help facilitate communication among members.

The mission of NAGAP is to engage and advance Graduate Enrollment Management Professionals by promoting excellence and collaboration through education, research, and professional development.



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